



Grow your best ever
strawberries
with expert Christine Walkden

MUST DO

This week!
**Plant corms
of gladiolus**

- 'Stool' vigorous budleja shrubs
- Sow seeds of hardy annuals
- Prepare outdoor seed beds
- Adjust soil acidity for fruit
- Prick-out chilli seedlings
- Grow your own mushrooms

Amateur

Gardening



TOBY BUCKLAND

**Toby wages war
on an appalling
stink on the
veg plot**

Lift and divide perennials

Now's the time
as plant crowns
push up shoots



Keep cats off your soil

Follow expert advice
from Toby Buckland

Plant new potatoes

Lucy explains how
to get a great crop
of early spuds



Take cuttings of devil's ivy

This amazing house plant
is simple to propagate and
makes a stunning feature



Plant exotic alstroemerias

**Best varieties
& how to grow**

**10 essential care tips
for a top class lawn**



25 MARCH 2017



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25 March 2017

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4 Love your lawn



Tim Rumball Editor's letter

PART of my job as Editor of this magazine is to check that the information we give is correct. It can be tricky, because I don't have all the answers and many of the people who write for us are the best in the business. A certain amount of tact is called-for.

Anyway, I was reading Anne Swithinbank's feature on hydrangeas (see p38). A bit on pruning caught my attention: "Take off old flower heads by cutting back to the topmost pair of fat buds in spring. Remove more than this and you are cutting away this year's flowers," warns Anne.

Now, my wife Kath prunes the hydrangea in our front garden. She's done it for about five years, and it always flowers beautifully, and she always cuts

last year's stems in early spring to the lowest bud – effectively 'stooling' the plant. Very different from Anne's advice.

I needed to know who was right quickly, but I can't go around challenging information supplied by our experts. Then it occurred to me to ask another expert – John Negus, who answers many of our Q&A enquiries. I emailed details of my conundrum, and his reply made me laugh out loud.

"Anne is correct. So is your wife. Macrophylla (mop head) varieties are pruned as Anne describes. Paniculata species like you have are stooled – cut to within 4in of the base in spring. New shoots flower at their tips in summer."

Isn't gardening a fascinating pastime? Have a great gardening week.

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Get in touch!

■ amateurgardening@timeinc.com
■ Westover House, West Quay Rd,
Poole Dorset BH15 1JG

■ ☎ 01202 440840

Experts helpline:

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■ ☎ 0800 915 9891
(12-1 Monday - Friday)

Your Gardening Week



with AG's gardening expert Ruth Hayes

TopTip

The easiest way to feed, weed, moss-kill and thicken a lawn is to use a combined product – there are several on the market. The soil should be damp, and you will see the effects within a few days.

I always spend a complete day around the end of March just focusing on my lawn, and putting it right after the ravages of winter



Al Tindie

Lawn care in the spring

After our wet and frosty winter, **Ruth** offer some lawn care advice to help get the best possible grass in 2017

IF you want your lawn to be the best it possibly can be in 2017, start its annual maintenance now. In one day, you could set the scene for your best-ever grass year!

Over the coming months you will need to mow and edge the lawn every week, and water it if we are lucky enough to get a period of hot, dry weather (and we don't find ourselves on the receiving end of a

hosepipe ban. This, admittedly, does seem a tad unlikely so far this year).

But to get that 'top class grass' we all desire, there are a number of jobs that need doing just the once – and now is the time to get on with them.

The three most important of these are scarifying, spiking and feeding. Do them in this order, in close sequence, to get the best result from your efforts.

Scarifying and spiking lawns

Getting air and oxygen to the grass



1 Apply a moss killer such as lawn sand. In 2 weeks moss will turn black. Rake it up using a spring-tined rake, or use an electric scarifier on large lawns.



2 Now spike the soil to get air to the grass roots. Drive a fork into the lawn every 6in (15cm), at least 4in (10cm) deep. Scatter JI No3 compost over the surface.

Step by step

Seeding over bare patches or thin grass



1 Now is a good time to sow fresh seed over any bare patches. Start by removing any weeds by hand.



2 Break up the hard surface of the soil. Do this with a hand fork. Then level it and tread over it lightly to firm it.



3 Sprinkle the grass seed evenly over the bare area. For the best results, follow the guidelines on the packet.

Tip: If you see worm casts on your lawn, wait until they are dry and then brush them away with a brush. Don't tread on them or flatten them as weeds will grow.



Four ways to improve edges

Sharp border edges create a smart garden in no time at all



1 The basic way to tidy the lawn edge is to use a pair of edging shears to cut off the lanky strands. This should be done every time you mow the lawn through the year. This first real edge-trimming of the season, however, may need extra effort to cut through thicker tufts.

2 Remove all of the cut grass and other debris by hand. This can then go on to the compost heap. Only then will the lawn start to look tidier. Once you have done this, you will be able to see if the side of the edges have collapsed or need to be recut with the half-moon iron.



3 A half-moon edging iron will create a perfect, vertical edge. Hold the handle vertically with the semi-circular blade at a place close to the edge, and push your foot down on the tread. Pull back on the handle slightly to remove a slice of edge, and work along the bed.



4 You can purchase and install wood, metal, stone, brick or plastic edging, to protect the edges and give a permanently neat end to your lawn. The plastic edging pictured comes in 4ft (1.2m) lengths for clipping together and knocking into place with a mallet.

Cutting heights

Cut without damaging the lawn



FOR the first cut of the year, raise the height of the mower blades to the highest setting, so that the grass is just tipped. When grass is long (and wet) following the winter lull, if you cut it too short you will stress it, and encourage possible diseases to set in. You'll also clog up the mower in no time!

As spring progresses, gradually reduce the height of cut until the desired height is reached. For most back garden lawns this will be 1½in (4cm) in spring and autumn, and ½-1in (13-25mm) in summer.

For fine 'bowling green'-like lawns, this height of cut from spring to autumn is ¼-½in (6-13mm) but it won't wear so well.



4 Gently rake over the area so that some seed is under the soil. It will germinate, but be safe from hungry birds.



5 I like to place nylon netting over the patch, held in place by plant labels. It helps keep bird, cats, and people off!



6 Water the patch well. New shoots will start to appear in a week, but don't walk over the area for about eight weeks.



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The Safer Way to Feed your Lawn



Your Gardening Week

with AG's gardening expert Ruth Hayes

TopTip

Raked soil is often used by cats as a toilet, so deter them using a layer of twigs or a harmless chemical deterrent such as Cat-a-Pult.

Check seed packets for sowing requirements before sowing.

All Time Inc



Colourful hardy annuals

For swathes of colour sow hardy annuals, says **Ruth**

ICAN'T think of a cheaper or easier way to fill a border with colour than to throw down a packet of annual seeds. Just one packet will fill a decent area, but two or three packets, sown in drifts across the bed, will give the 'wow' factor we all crave.

Hardy annuals don't perish if we get some late frosts, but half-hardy annuals may. Half-hardies should be raised under cover and planted out in May/June.

If you have the ideal border – empty,

dug, weeded and raked to a fine tilth – all you need is a way to make little drills in the surface and some dry sand to set out areas to create those drifts of colour.

The trick is to divide your bed into irregular shaped and sized areas, one for each flower variety.

If you keep the areas regular in shape, you will always end up with flowers noticeably growing in rows. But if that's what you want, then go for it!

Here's how I sowed my bed last week:

Plant a perennial now

■ Planting perennials now makes sense. The soil is warming up, and you can spot gaps left by plants that didn't survive the colder months.

■ While plants are standing in water, to give their rootballs a good soaking, dig a hole as deep as the pot.

■ Slide the plant from its pot, and tease out the roots before placing the rootball in the hole.

■ Infill with soil, and firm down. Water well and add a layer of mulch. Don't let

Plant perennials as deep as their rootball, and water well afterwards



the plant dry out, and keep it pest- and weed-free.

Step by step

Sowing night-scented stocks

Sow direct for a stunning show



1 Weed the bed and remove debris. Rake it to a fine tilth, lightly tread the soil, and water with a fine spray.



2 If broadcasting seeds, you can mark out their designated areas using sand to draw partitions.



3 Alternatively, make drills. They can go in different directions, to create a more natural look.



4 Sow seeds, then rake them over. Label, and mark out the sown area to stop people trampling on it.

Your Gardening Week

with AG's gardening expert Marc Rosenberg



Gladioli are valuable for adding height and colour to borders



Buy corms now while stocks are plentiful

I'm starting my gladioli corms in pots, in a frost-free conservatory

Plant gladioli corms now

Vulgar? Not now! Gladioli are back in fashion, says **Marc**

THANKS to Australian comedian Barry Humphries (better known as Dame Edna Everage), gladioli were once regarded as the height of horticultural vulgarity – as fashionable as an avocado bathroom suite.

Luckily, cries of “Hello Possums” while

you're tending your “gladdies” are a thing of the past. Just like the dahlia, also once regarded as an ugly duckling, gladioli are making a comeback.

Clever breeding has led to stronger plants and a more sophisticated colour palette, making gladioli a must-have for

adding height at the backs of borders, or growing in containers.

Gladioli corms hate being sat in heavy, wet soil, so I prefer to start mine into growth in large pots, in the safety of a frost-free greenhouse, conservatory or a bright, cool room of the house.

Actively-growing clumps of young plants can be hardened off and planted out from May onwards. See below for a step-by-step guide get corms going.

Do it now!

How to start gladioli corms in a pot



1 Buy corms now: Buy corms while stocks are plentiful at garden centres. Corms sold loosely are often bigger than those sold in bags.



2 Store safely: To avoid corms rotting, or being exposed to cold night temperatures, store in a cool, frost-free place until you're ready to plant.



3 Prepare a container: Choose a big, deep pot with plenty of drainage holes. Part-fill with multi-purpose compost, firming the compost gently.



4 Plant corms: Holding each corm with the pointy end facing up, plant 8in (20cm) deep. Leave as much space between corms as possible.



5 Provide support: Taller gladioli can need staking. To avoid damaging the corms at a later stage, insert supports at planting time. Top-up with compost.



6 Plant out: Harden off then plant out when frosts end. Feed every two weeks with high-potash fertiliser (tomato food) as flower spikes form.

Your Gardening Week

with Peter Seabrook, AG's classic gardening expert

Listen to Peter's free podcast every Thursday. Search for 'This Week In The Garden with Peter Seabrook' on iTunes



The latest lawn seeds are packed with technological advances for strong growth

A little lubrication is virtually all it has taken for more than 60 years of smooth lawn mowing from Peter's trusty Ransomes Ajax

Peter's tips for spring lawn care



1 Worn lawns are improved by the addition of some new lawn seed either in spring or the autumn.



2 Where lawns are badly infested, apply a selective weed killer rather than a general weed and feed.



3 Rotary and hover mowers are better than cylinders at cutting long grass and turfed banks.

The thinking lawnmower

From Ransomes to Robomow – technology in lawn mowing and care and has come a long way, says **Peter**

THIS year sees the 70th Anniversary of Gardeners' Question Time on radio and the 50th for Gardeners' World on TV. We'll be looking at the huge changes in gardens and gardening over those years in the Horticultural Trades Association Back Garden Exhibit at Chelsea Flower Show in May.

Take lawns for example. In 1947 suburban gardens would have had a simple push mower and perhaps a heavy

were made to last, though: indeed I'm still pushing my Ransomes 12in (30cm) Ajax over two lawns each week and have done so for years with the mower going in for a service just the once.

This year sees the introduction of the Bosch Indego robotic mower which can be controlled from anywhere in the world with a smartphone. It mows in straight lines to give the light and dark mown foot print, remembers where it has got to (if it needs to take itself off to recharge batteries) and even monitors the weather so it mows more frequently when conditions are wet and warm.

There have been considerable improvements in cultivars of lawn grasses too. Back in the 1950s rye grass was for grazing cattle, while today we have deep rooted, fine-leaved rye grasses that are hard wearing and valuable constituents in lawn grass seed mixtures.

And lawn fertilisers now come in slow release form with mini-granules that continue to feed the grass for months, releasing more feed when temperatures and moisture are high and then shut down when temperatures drop. Clever stuff.

"A robotic mower can be controlled with a smartphone"

roller. Fifty years ago (it seems like only yesterday) saw the first Flymo hover mower and since then we've seen the introduction of electric lawn rakers, battery leaf blowers and robotic mowers.

The machines from the 1940s and 50s

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Your Gardening Week

with AG's gardening expert Ruth Hayes



Top Tip

Before choosing and buying a new plant, check its growing requirements, and how large it will ultimately grow, to make sure it fits in with your garden, and is planted with enough space.

Mulch after planting to lock moisture in the soil

Pruning your 'butterfly bush'



■ If left unpruned, *Buddleja davidii* – also known as 'butterfly bush' – soon become unruly, and take over their corner of the garden.

■ To keep plants healthy and shapely, cut them back hard now, before they really get into their spring growth.

■ This is known as 'stooling', and involves pruning branches hard back without cutting into the old wood where no shoots are forming.

■ Hard pruning keeps the shrub size manageable, and encourages it to put on strong, new growth from the base which will flower well in summer – and bring the butterflies flocking!

■ As with all shrubs, after pruning feed with a slow-release organic fertiliser, and mulch with well-rotted compost or manure.

Planting a small shrub

Ruth uses the better weather to plant a colourful Hebe

SPRING is a great time for planting new shrubs, as the soil is damp and warming up, and the ambient temperature is rising.

I planted a *Hebe* 'Heartbreaker'. This pretty evergreen grows to around 3ft (1m), tall with a similar spread. Its leaves are edged with cream, and turn pink in cold weather. It produces attractive, lavender-coloured flowers in summer.

The *Hebe* came from Garden Beauty (☎ 01489 550 830, 🌐 gardenbeauty.co.uk), who specialise in mail-order plants.

Hebes will grow in most poor to moderately fertile, free-draining soils. Improve heavy clay soils with lots of garden compost and grit.

Planting small shrubs is relatively easy, but remember to check them regularly, and don't let them dry out.

Step by step

Place trunk guards around tall shrubs and trees if your garden is visited by deer and rabbits.



Plant a shrub in five simple steps

Water the plant well, and then mulch with a layer of organic matter. This keeps the soil damp and helps suppress weeds.



1 Stand your shrub in water before planting, to saturate the rootball and make it easier to slide from its pot.



3 My soil is thin and chalky, so I added a layer of well-rotted manure to the bottom of the planting hole.



2 Dig a hole as deep as the rootball, and slightly wider. Plants won't thrive if set too high, or too deep.



4 Slide the plant from its pot, place it in the hole, and infill with a mix of soil and compost. Firm it in.



Your Gardening Week

with AG's gardening expert Ruth Hayes



Always hold seedlings by their leaves when pricking out

TopTip

Chilli seedlings are robust, and thrive in multi-purpose or John Innes No 2 compost. More delicate seedlings need John Innes No 1.

Step by step

Pricking out chillies

Robust seedlings have grown and now need their own containers



1 Fill 3in (7cm) or smaller pots with compost, water it and make holes in the compost using a dibber.



2 Using a plant label, or old spoon, carefully lever a seedling's rootball free of the compost.



3 Gently hold a leaf between thumb and finger, and transport the seedling to its own pot.



4 Firm the seed in gently, so the plant is supported. Water and place it somewhere light and warm.

Pot up chilli seedlings

Ruth moves her robust seedlings into their own pots

THE chilli seeds I sowed in the middle of February have germinated and grown into healthy young seedlings.

They are growing in propagators on a warm windowsill, and have developed a pair of 'proper' leaves each, so are ready to be pricked out into individual pots.

The key to successfully completing this move, without damaging any plants, is to avoid touching their delicate stems, which are easily crushed.

To pick up the seedlings, slip something thin and flat, such as the end of a plastic plant label or a teaspoon, under the roots.

Lever the little rootball from the soil, and keep the plant steady by carefully holding its leaves. They can then be moved into their own pot of compost – I used multi-purpose, as chillies are pretty robust plants – and grown on.

Place the seedlings somewhere light and warm, out of hot, direct sunlight, as this can scorch the leaves.

It's your last chance to sow your leeks

■ This month is your last opportunity to sow leeks if you want big, strong plants for autumn. They are easy to grow, just needing a weed-free site, regular watering, and plenty of sun.

■ You can sow them in situ, or in deep pots, before pricking them out and potting them on until they are 5-7in (15-20cm) tall, and looking robust.

■ They can then be planted out in rows, and 'puddled in' – placed in planting holes and well watered so the soil falls around them and supports



Sow leeks in deep pots or root trainers, and pot on until they are large enough to plant out

Sow seeds generously

them. This helps avoid soil falling in between their layers.

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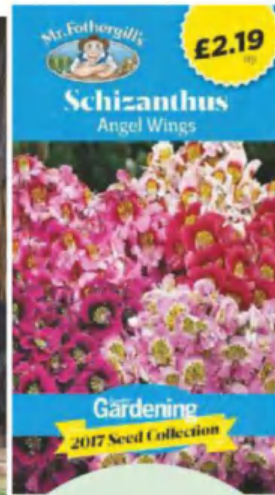


Your Gardening Week

with AG's gardening expert Ruth Hayes



I'm raking the soil to a fine tilth before sowing my cornflower seeds direct



TopTip

Schizanthus can be grown as indoor plants. When seedlings reach the size that they can be handled properly, pot them individually, first to 5in (12cm) pots, and then to 6in (15cm) pots.

Sowing this week's free seeds

Ruth shows how to sow cornflowers and angel wings

TWO – yes two – free packets of seeds this week! Your seed-sowing season continues with the beautiful cornflower 'Blue Ball' (which will bloom from July–Sept), and Schizanthus 'Angel Wings Mix' (which blooms Jun–Sept).

The cornflowers produce masses of true blue flowers. Delightful in borders and cottage garden settings, where they will attract butterflies and bees, the long-stemmed 'Blue Ball' flowers are good to cut for a vase indoors. The blooms can also be dried if desired.

I love seeing these cornflowers with bright yellows and oranges... just some cornflowers and calendulas loosely placed in a jam jar on the kitchen table is enough to cheer me up for a month.

Its seeds can be sown direct in the garden where it is to flower. It does best in full sun on well-drained soils, including those that are dry, of low fertility or chalky.

The schizanthus, also known as angel wings or poor man's orchid, come in a mix of pinks, maroons, reds and near-white, usually with yellow centres.

Plants grow to about 16in (40cm) high and almost as wide, and make an attractive border plant, a good cut flower and a fine conservatory plant.

Occasionally nip out some of the buds when they are small. This encourages the plant to produce more stems and grow even bigger.



Carefully hand-sow the Schizanthus seeds on to the surface of the compost

How to sow inside and out

■ Cornflowers



Outside sowing

1 Rake soil to a fine tilth, sprinkle the seeds evenly across the area and lightly rake over them.



2 Water them in and label. Seedlings appear in 14–28 days. Thin seedlings to 8in (20cm) apart.

■ Schizanthus



Inside sowing

1 Sow the seeds thinly on moist seed compost. Lightly cover the seeds so they are ¼in (6mm) deep.



2 Water, and place in a temperature of 15–20°C (60–68°F). Keep moist. Seedlings appear in 14–28 days.

Your Gardening Week

with Lucy Chamberlain, AG's fruit and veg expert



Timelapse unless credited

A soft paintbrush tickled in the flower centre will transfer pollen from flower to flower

TopTip

It's difficult to protect blossom on bigger fruit trees, so consider just wrapping a few individual branches in fleece – choose ones with plenty of blossom! Uncover them in warm spells.

Step by step

Looking after flowers



Gerry

1 Frost damages blossom. If forecast move potted fruits under cover. Cloak garden plants in thick fleece.



2 If your fruit needs a pollination partner, provide one. Hand-pollinate fruit under cover.



3 If flowering is poor, the tree may be too young, many have been pruned too hard, or overfed nitrogen.

Protect fruit blossom

Lucy has a few ideas to ensure good fruit crops

FLOWERS in the fruit garden look great, but they're also essential for good yields.

In March and April the majority of our fruit crops will be in bloom, so what can you do to ensure that these precious flowers transform into fruit? Plenty! The main role of pruning and training is to encourage lots of flowers. Stems that are

tied in horizontally and pruned to form fruiting spurs will yield far more heavily than those that aren't. Hopefully you've been following my advice over the past weeks and months, pruning your trees and bushes to maximise flower numbers. So you should now be looking at masses of blossom. Here's how to turn those flowers into fruit:

Sow glasshouse cucumbers



Seeds sown now (circled) will produce great glasshouse cues

If you resent forking out for supermarket cucumbers which go off very quickly – welcome to the revolution! Home-grown cucumbers last far longer, cost less and above all, taste better.

A heated or sheltered greenhouse helps these vigorous vines to romp away and produce prolific crops (outdoor cues don't get sown till May). Choose for a mildew-resistant variety like 'Passandra' or 'Femspot' and decide whether to grow long, conventional cues or mini snackbox varieties (the latter crop heavily).

Sow seeds individually in pots of moist seed compost, place in a warm propagator (20°C) and expect germination in 7-14 days. Keep warm and moist – I'll tell you what to do next later!

Next week: Lucy shows how to prick-out seedlings, keep forced strawberries on track, plant oca (right), mulch fruit trees and take herb cuttings



When green shoots appear rake earth up around them

Plant early potato tubers in trenches. Set tubers 12in (30cm) apart, with 24in (60cm) between rows



Add sulphur chips at the rate recommended on the packet

Boost soil acidity if necessary

ARE you a fan of blueberries and raspberries, or perhaps you've got a cranberry, gaultheria or lingonberry on your plot? All are delicious fruits!

These berries all need acidic soil to grow well. The time to check and adjust it is now, just as the soil is warming up, and it's easy to do.

Just purchase a soil pH testing kit from a garden centre, establish the pH level of beds growing these plants and, if needed, adjust the pH to make it more acidic.

Sulphur chips acidify the soil and are readily available at good garden centres. Check the dosage rates on the packaging (clay soils need more sulphur than sandy ones to lower pH), and apply accordingly.

Plant early potato tubers

FANCY tucking into a steaming bowl of melt-in-the-mouth new potatoes in mid June? I do, that's why I'm getting my first early tubers in the ground about now. New potatoes are my favourites. They're first to come out of the soil, beating potato blight attacks in July or August, and they taste unbelievably good.

Potato foliage will die back if hit by frosts. That's the gamble with 'first early' varieties. Consequently they need a sheltered site – and ask experienced local gardeners what's the earliest time you can safely plant out.

If you have a greenhouse plant some

tubers in large pots – these will avoid the frosts and mature even earlier than those planted outside. You don't need large barrels – small pots 10in (25cm) wide, 12in (30cm) deep, are easier to manage and 8-litre 'potato bags' are even cheaper. Plant one tuber, 5in (12cm) deep, per pot.

To grow spuds in the soil, dig trenches 8in (20cm) deep in the most sheltered, sunny part of your veggie patch. Space first early tubers in the bottom 12in (30cm) apart, covering them with soil to make 5in (12cm) mounds over the rows. Green shoots will appear in two or three weeks. Rake soil up around the leaves to keep frost off, or cloak plants in fleece.

Prepare seedbeds outdoors

THERE are lots of benefits to sowing seed directly outdoors in the soil. No fancy (costly) propagator is needed; the tricky hardening-off stage is avoided; your shed isn't cluttered with compost; and many crops prefer it!

Sowing root crops like carrots and parsnips in modules, for example, has disastrous effects on taproot development. Salads bolt at the slightest whiff of becoming rootbound.

Crops sown outside grow hard and stocky, making them more resilient to

disease attack, too. With the soil warming in many counties, now is the time to fork over bare areas then rake out stones and large clumps of earth to prepare a bed for your sowing. With spring soil likely to be wet, do this task the morning before you want to sow, then rake again every few hours. This helps create a crumbly rather than cloddy bed. Rigid plastic or glass cloches also help dry out and warm up wetter soils. Once your seedbed resembles breadcrumbs, draw a shallow drill and sow your chosen crop.



Weed then rake soil to a fine tilth. Feeding is not necessary

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Your Gardening Week

with AG's indoor plant expert Anne Swithinbank



'Feeding indoor plants regularly is important to keep them looking healthy'

Step by step

Day to day care of devil's ivy



1 Give a general purpose liquid fertilizer at half the normal strength roughly once a fortnight while the plant is in active growth.



2 Plants cling to a moss pole with aerial roots, but keeping it moist is tricky. Wet it occasionally, but watering the pot is more important.



3 Use a long stem for cuttings. To make a tip cutting trim beneath a node where leaf meets stem, and use stem chunks, each with two nodes.



4 Set cuttings in multipurpose compost/grit mixed 50:50. Bury aerial roots, keep growing point near the surface. Cover with polythene.

TopTip

Devil's ivy is said to be poisonous to cats, so keep plants well away from their usual play, feeding, prowling areas. Sensible precautions will avoid hefty vet bills!

The devil's ivy

Epipremnum is ideal for shady corners, says **Ruth**

FOR the shadier corners of a house, we turn to plants whose natural habitat is the gloomy, humid floor of a tropical rain forest. One of the best is *Epipremnum pinnatum* 'Aureum' also known as devil's ivy, from the arum-lily family. Originally from the Solomon Islands in the South Pacific east of Papua New Guinea, it is now grown in tropical gardens worldwide, and as a house plant.

As a youngster, devil's ivy swarms over the ground, producing juvenile heart-shaped leaves to 6in (15cm) long, green splashed with gold. On finding a tree or

other vertical surface, stems climb, clinging with aerial roots and producing larger leaves to 30in (75cm) long, irregularly slashed around the outside. In the house, plants usually remain juvenile but enthusiastic and I've known one grow happily around the back of a piano.

Should you want a better behaved plant, try the closely related *Scindapsus pictus* 'Argyraeus', the silver vine or satin pothos introduced from Borneo in 1859. It's less vigorous and produces neat, heart-shaped leaves decorated with silver smudges and a silvery rim.

Keeping devil's ivy healthy

■ Although shade is tolerated for a while, good but not direct light will maintain healthy growth and enhance leaf colours long-term.

■ Normal room temperatures (not near radiators) suit epipremnum with a minimum of 50°F (10°C).

■ Allow the surface of the compost to begin drying out between waterings.

■ Pot young plants on to larger containers in spring. Prune invading stems when necessary, cutting beyond a leaf (use them as cuttings).

■ Create moss pole extensions using canes, moss and nylon fishing line, train stems around strings fixed higher up or allow plants to drape and trail after they've reached the top.

Your Gardening Week

with Bob Flowerdew, AG's organic gardening expert



Top Tip

Have a walk around the garden in twilight and make notes of what still needs to be done later in the week.



Bob has set up a system to ensure he keeps on top of gardening jobs

Every job has its day

Keeping on top of tasks is easier with a routine, says **Bob**

HIP hip hoorah, it's summertime again! Well, British Summer Time. The extra hour is so valuable to us gardeners. Suddenly there's light enough in the evening to get some jobs done. The only bugbear is there's never enough time to get all the jobs done, so some get overlooked...

Of course, every day I attend to watering and harvest whatever is ready

"Each day has a primary allotted task"

as these are tasks that must never be deferred. And huge seasonal jobs such as hedge cutting are seldom forgotten. No, it's the regular jobs that are pressing but not urgent that get overlooked. However, I've found it a boon to have routine to fall

back on, which ensures that I get most regular jobs done within each week or so.

It all started when I found I'd adopted 'Feed on Friday' as a prompt. If I fed liquid feed to my container-grown plants only on a Friday I found I seldom forgot or doubled up by accident. I then added 'Sow on Saturday', which worked really well as previously I'd often missed sowing windows by being busy with something else. Thinning, trimming and dead heading are now due on Tuesdays, with transplanting and potting up on Thursdays; and of course weeding just has to be Wednesdays. Monday stands for machinery and is my day for getting the grass cut for the week ahead. Thus, each day has a primary allotted task, and once this has been done I can tackle whatever appeals or is most needful.

Then there is the most important part of each day's routine: the twilight walkabout. I visit every part of my garden, and while it's always too late to actually do anything, I can make notes of what needs to be done. After that, it's time for a huge mug of tea, and biscuits.

Bob's to-do list for the week



1 The sun can suddenly turn surprisingly hot in spring so keep an eye on greenhouse ventilation.



2 Outdoor plants in small pots can remain dry despite rain. They'll need careful watering.



3 Pot on seedlings, plugs and modular young plants well before they become pot-bound.



4 Apricot and peach trees need their fruitlets thinning ruthlessly as soon as these have set.

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Your Gardening Week

with Tamsin Westhorpe in her country garden



Tamsin has decided to lift and divide a spreading iris that doesn't fit her border plans



Most clump-forming perennials are easily lifted with a garden fork



Baby plants will be potted up and given away to friends



How to divide perennials

Tamsin lifts and splits before the growing season takes off

THERE are plenty of good reasons to divide clump-forming perennials now. One is to rejuvenate plants, and another is to make room for more. It's great to propagate your favourite plants for selling at charity events or to give to friends, and it also helps to control a plant that's taking over.

March is a good time to do this as plants are just about to go into active growth and division is more successful when plants

are not in full growth. Leave it until early summer and you'll be putting your other perennials at risk as you work in the border. Your new divisions will also need lots of TLC. As a guide, plan to divide plants every three to five years.

Do you remember last May when I created a purple and orange border with dahlias and kniphofias? At the back of this border is a clump of iris that is too large and the flowers don't match my scheme, so I've lifted and divided them to plant

elsewhere and to give away. The iris lifted easily with a border fork and I could then break the plant apart. In some cases, you'll need to prize plants apart using two back-to-back garden forks and you might even need a sharp garden knife to divide very compact clumps.

The heart of the plant is often woody and unproductive, so this can be put on the compost. The new plants, meanwhile, can either be planted into their new home straight away or potted for planting later.



The plump growing tips on rogersia make great new plants

Propagating rogersia is easy

ARE you looking for a reliable foliage plant for a moist soil? If so, look no further than *Rodgersia pinnata* 'Superba'.

Now is prime time to ask gardening friends if they have one of these striking plants – and if they do it's the perfect time to do a bit of plant swapping. If you're in a gardening club you could put out a request for this plant at your next get-together. Gardeners are generous people and are often happy to share.

At this time of year you'll see the new bulbous rogersia 'pups' bursting out of the ground. If you find a plant with plenty of these 'pups' simply cut one off and pot it up.

The mature clump in my garden has plenty so I've carefully removed them with secateurs, and in some cases a small pruning saw. Each pup is removed with a small amount of root and then potted up.

Tip: Don't forget to sow your tomato seeds now, or look out for starter plants to grow on. For a sweet taste that the kids will love go for 'Gardener's Delight'



TEEM

Growing-on economy plug plants

Create a great summer display on a budget – buy mini plug plants now to pot on

THERE'S no denying that buying mature summer bedding plants in May can be very expensive. So to put on a good show while sticking to a budget you can buy mini plug plants now.

I've treated myself to some osteospermum (African daisies) and petunias, and the task now is to grow them on. Follow my step-by-step guide for success:

1. Take a good look at the plug plants to make sure they're in good health before buying them. You'll find many sizes of plug plants on offer, but the smaller ones are often the best value.

2. Ideally your plugs need to be potted on as soon as you get home, but if not find a convenient place for them on a windowsill – avoid a very bright south-facing aspect. Choose a cool room and avoid a windowsill with a radiator below.

3. Now's your chance to recycle the army of small pots you have cluttering up your shed. Fill them with multipurpose or young plant compost and place them in a drip proof tray.

4. Carefully push the young plants out of their tray or starter pot – it you need to



pull them out hold them by a leaf – never the stem. Using a pencil or your finger make a hole in the compost and gently plant them in their roomy new home.

5. Water, label, and place in a bright, cool room. In a few weeks they may need potting on again before planting out after Jack Frost has left us for the year.

Fabulous farmyard manure for free

LIVING in rural Herefordshire there's no shortage of farmyard manure. This valuable, natural product offers the gardener plenty to smile about. It's the ideal ingredient for a compost heap and adds valuable nutrients to garden soil.

If you live near a farm or stables offer to go and muck out – that way you're very likely to get your supply of manure free of charge. I recently filled my car boot with bags of horse manure after an hour of voluntary mucking out.

The most important thing is to compost your fresh manure. Use it straight away and it'll be too rich for plants and you'll also have problems with weeds.

The sure-fire way to kill off weed seed in manure is to put it on a hot compost heap. The centre of the heap needs to reach 55°C and be turned regularly. I'd then leave it to rot and steam for at least six months before applying it to the garden. So pull on your wellies and grab a pitch fork – there's work to be done!



Your Gardening Week

with Tamsin Westhorpe in her country garden



Choose a tree with only one, strong central leader



Spend time looking at the shape of trees and shrubs before you buy

Don't over-feed your pond fish

WATCHING fish glide about your pond can be very relaxing. We have about five mature goldfish in a raised pond and without them the formal feature wouldn't be half as interesting.

This pond is home to only a few aquatic plants, so our fish need their diet supplemented. In a natural, well-balanced pond additional food is less of a priority.

During the winter they don't need feeding as the food will remain uneaten and this can rot and pollute the water, but with the weather warming up goldfish start to become more active. Once the water temperature starts to creep over 10°C they need feeding.

Until spring is reliably warm only feed lightly. Feed what the fish can eat within a few minutes. If it's left on the surface for longer you're over-feeding.



Feed pond fish only sparingly early in the year

Shape up or ship out

TREES and shrubs are a long-term investment, so before opening your wallet some thought needs to go into which ones are right for your garden. Create a list of the plants you fancy and then head to a specialist nursery to seek further advice.

My uncle recently went on a serious shopping spree at our local tree nursery and came home with a nice collection of magnolias, lilacs and cornus that will

decorate the garden for decades. He has a good eye for a plant and he'd picked out those with a strong framework.

When selecting trees and shrubs pull them out of the row, stand back and admire their form. Choose trees with only one central leader, no crossing or rubbing branches and a balanced shape.

Before planting prune out any awkward branches – it's easier to do this when they're still in their pots.

Cover the tray with a sheet of cling film



Tamsin chose the Suffolk Mushrooms kit from Taylors Bulbs

Planning for a mushroom feast

WE adore mushrooms in my household so I thought it high time I grew some myself. I've invested in a small kit and plan to place the container in our cellar which is dark and frost free.

The kits would make a great present for a young gardener as they're so easy to do. Simply add water to the mini bag of compost and leave it to soak. Then put 90% of the mycelium into the drip-proof tray. Cover with the moist compost and then add the last 10% to the top of the compost. I then covered the surface with cling film. It's now a case of sit back, watch and wait.

Next week

with Martyn Cox
AG's city gardener

On the fence

Martyn picks the perfect fence for his small garden

Transplanting shrubs

How to move a plant that's in the wrong place

Potting potatoes

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Gardening News

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Prices of garden sheds are likely to start rising as early as next month



Retailers are reluctantly putting-up shed prices

Brexit to 'push up cost of sheds'

Sheds will cost 10 per cent more due to rising timber prices

WOOD you believe it! Brexit is set to put up the price of garden sheds.

Manufacturers say that currency fluctuations following the UK's decision to leave the EU has hit them with shed loads of extra costs.

Timber and raw materials for garden sheds typically make up 66 per cent of the cost that shoppers pay.

Shed-makers claim that the price of imported raw materials has soared due to currency fluctuations caused by Brexit. This, they say, has increased their costs by a whopping 14 per cent.

"The price of imported raw materials soared"

So far, rising costs have been absorbed by manufacturers, as High Street retailers locked in fierce competition have refused to allow price rises.

However, industry experts warned last week that consumers are likely to see the

price of garden sheds rise by eight to 10 per cent this year.

As retailers prepare to raise shed prices in April, managing director of Mercia Garden Products, Terry Waldron, said: "As the dust has settled, and reality sets in, this has led to 'Blue Chip' retailers accepting cost price increases, albeit very reluctantly."

Smaller sheds

A statement released by shed review and buyers' guide website Whatshed.co.uk said that manufacturers were "working hard to reduce costs" but suggested that "potential job freezes or cuts are likely" in the industry.

The website predicted that Brexit price rises could lead consumers to buy smaller garden sheds, or lower specification outbuildings. This is likely to lead to an increase in competition between retailers.

Sales of garden buildings have increased over the last two years as cash-strapped Brits enjoy more 'staycations' (holidaying at home).

Dibleys breeds a fine crop of cape primroses

DIBLEY'S Nurseries is to release four new streptocarpus from its breeding programme this spring.

The popular houseplants have been bred by the North Wales-based nursery's Lynne Dibley, who won the RHS's Reginald Cory Memorial Cup last year for her hybridisation programme.

The four newcomers will be seen for the first time at the RHS Malvern, Chelsea and Hampton Court flower shows.

All of the new streptocarpus cost £4 each. Go to dibleys.com or call ☎ (01978) 790677 for details.

■ S. 'Gold Dust'

Flowering over eight months, blooms have lower lobes that change from pure-gold to speckled gold on a deep-purple background. It'll be unveiled at the RHS Malvern Spring Festival in Worcestershire in May.



■ S. 'Sweet Rosy' –

Scented variety with large white and purple/pink flowers. Lower lobes change to coral/rose as flowers age. A strong variety averaging four blooms per stem. Set to debut at RHS Chelsea Flower Show in May.



■ S. 'Titania'

Upper lobes of small, ruffled-edged flowers are creamy-white while its lower three lobes are cherry-pink with yellow 'fangs'. A free-flowering variety, it's said to bloom for eight months of the year.



■ S. 'Elin' – veined

lavender flowers are slightly scented and borne over six months. Flowers take on a pink tinge with age. Up to 10 blooms per flower stem. To be released at the RHS Hampton Court Palace Flower Show in July.





A nation of twitchers

Gadgets are encouraging a new generation of urban bird-watchers. A survey found that one in three Brits enjoy spying on birds and wildlife.



Explore London's secret gardens

Tickets are on sale for Open Garden Squares Weekend in London (17-18 June). 10 Downing Street will open its garden. ☞ opensquares.org.

Lottery cash will secure fruit heritage

THE Georgian walled garden, along with grounds and parkland at historic Cannon Hall near Barnsley, is to get a £3million restoration.

The three-year project is being bankrolled by the Heritage Lottery Fund and the Big Lottery Fund's Parks for People programme.

The Friends of Cannon Hall, volunteers who help maintain the gardens and estate, have raised over £40,000 to contribute to match funding of £740,000.

The walled garden has 50 varieties of pears, one of the largest Collections in the north and a 200-year-old muscat grape vine. It includes the remains of a pinery, an 18th century greenhouse that grew pineapples and exotic fruit.

The money will be used to



Historic: gardens once grew pineapples and exotic fruit

transform the 70 acres of park, gardens and lakes. Lakes will be dredged, new paths created around the site and a two-acre woodland opened up.

Richard Emmerson, chair of the Friends, said: "Our local

heritage is of great importance to us all; it defines who we are and the character and identity of our communities and must be protected." The parks and gardens are free to visit and open 365 days a year.

Could drones replace dying bees?



In trouble: bees

THAT droning noise in your garden – is it the sound of a bee or a flying robotic insect busy pollinating the flowers?

The decline in bees has led scientists to turn to technology for help in plant fertilisation.

They have created an insect-sized drone, 1.5in (4cm) wide and weighing just 15 grams. The fuzzy body and stickiness of natural bees is replicated using gel and horsehair pads which pick up pollen grains.

New Scientist claims that in trials in Japan, a drone was able to cross-pollinate Japanese lilies with no damage to stamens or pistils.

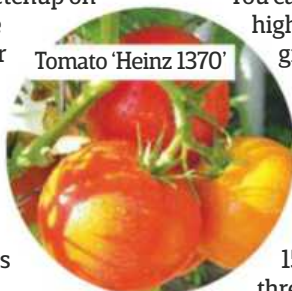
But Professor Simon Potts, of Reading University, said that pollinating robot bees is science fiction: "Technology has taken steps in that direction but is still barely out of the starting gate. Evolution crossed the finishing line millions of years ago," he said.

Grow your own Heinz tomato ketchup!

READERS who enjoy a dollop of ketchup on their food can now grow one of the original tomatoes that was bred for Heinz' famous sauce.

Tomato 'Heinz 1370' is a semi-bush variety bearing smooth and slightly-ribbed fruits on the same plant. Plants can produce 40-50 fruit each.

A spokeswoman said: "Gardeners may need to stake the branches to stop the masses of fruit bending them."



Tomato 'Heinz 1370'

Suttons

"You can expect crack-resistant fruit, high yields and flavour. Plants can be grown indoors, or outside in a sunny spot. 'Heinz 1370' will even grow well in a large container."

Dobies added that fruits "make amazing soup." Tomato 'Heinz 1370' is in Dobies' Rob Smith range, priced at £3 for a packet of 15 seeds. Plants start at £9.99 for three grafted super plugs. Go to ☞ dobies.co.uk. Call ☎ (0844) 967 0303.

A BLOOMIN' GOOD WEEK



Foggy Bottom garden

Adrian Bloom's Foggy Bottom, part of Bressingham Gardens near Norfolk, turns 50 this year. A special event is planned for September.



Planning your summer

Al Fresco Fortnight, which encourages people to eat and socialise outdoors, will kick-off on Father's Day, Sunday 18 June.



Alnwick Garden

A proposed £8.5million loan from Northumberland County Council to Alnwick garden has been suspended and is "under review".



Tree disputes

A Lancashire resident said two 70ft trees fell across his garden. He'd tried to axe the trees previously, but was told they were protected.

A BLOOMIN' BAD WEEK

Your Gardening Week



with AG's gardening wildlife expert *Graham Clarke*

What's On

25th March – 1st April

■ **25-26 March and 1-2 April:**

Haldon Grange, Dunchideock, Exeter, Devon EX6 7YE. Camellias, magnolias, rhododendrons, a lake and ponds with river and water cascades. Open 1pm-5pm for NGS, ☎ 01392 832349, 🌐 ngs.org.uk

■ **25 March:** The Manor House Street, Horncastle, Lincolnshire LN9 5HF. Informal spring garden and orchard bordered by the River Bain and including a short section of Roman fort wall. Open 12pm-4pm for NGS, 🌐 ngs.org.uk

■ **26 March:** Bere Mill, London Road, Whitchurch, Hampshire RG28 7NH. Water meadows and wooded valleys, herbaceous borders, an orchard and arboretums. The working mill made paper for the Bank of England in 1716. Open 1.30pm-5pm for NGS, ☎ 01256 892210, 🌐 ngs.org.uk

Bere Mill, Hants



■ **28-30 March:** RHS Spring Plant and Orchid Show: RHS Lindley Hall and RHS Lawrence Hall, 80 Vincent Square, Westminster, London SW1P 2PE. A celebration of spring plants. Open 10am-5pm, 🌐 rhs.org.uk

■ **28 March:** An Evening with Alys Fowler, RHS Garden Hyde Hall, Creep hedge Lane, Rettenden Common, Chelmsford CM3 8ET, ☎ 0203 1765 830, 🌐 rhs.org.uk/gardens/hyde-hall

■ **1 April-4 June:** International Garden Photographer of the Year Exhibition, RHS Garden Hyde Hall, Creep hedge Lane, Rettenden Common, Chelmsford CM3 8ET. ☎ 0203 1765 830, 🌐 rhs.org.uk/gardens/hyde-hall

■ Please check that the event is still going ahead before leaving home. If you have an event that you would like us to consider please email details to: amateurgardening@timeinc.uk



A hovering kestrel (this one's a male) is fairly easy to identify

A sparrowhawk comes in to land – in much the same way as it grabs its prey

Shutterstock/Alamy (inset)

Now let us prey

Some common birds of prey visit our gardens, but rarer ones can be identified too, says **Graham Clarke**

BIRDS of prey generally don't do any harm to the garden, other than to rid it of some smaller birds and mammals – but then the loss of the odd mouse or rat is likely to be welcomed.

I recently heard squawking in the garden and at first saw nothing, but then I spotted movement in a clump of bergenia: a sparrowhawk was doing for a poor blackbird. By the time I saw it the blackbird had already perished, so I left the hawk to continue its feed. It's the circle of life, and I prepared myself to clear up the feathers and bones later!

The sparrowhawk is the bird of prey you're most likely to see in and around gardens. It tends to pick off birds at tables and feeders, and if it gets to know a garden it may return many times.

It'll feed on anything from a wren to woodpigeon, and there's often a warning to its presence with other birds barracking, chasing even dive-bombing it, to try and send it packing.

Sparrowhawks are quick and agile, dashing over garden fences, through trees and along hedgerows on their quest for a meal.

In towns and cities you're more likely to see kestrels, which have the classic

falcon shape. Their ability to hover makes them easy to identify, and then you'll see them flap their wings quickly, before diving down in pursuit of rodents and insects.

Meanwhile, buzzards are present all year round in the west and in Wales. They're rather like a small eagle, but with a shorter and rounder tail. They can soar high, but most of their hunting is much nearer the ground.

The merlin is Britain's smallest bird of prey, and small in numbers too with just 900-1,500 breeding pairs. In the spring they leave their winter retreats in coastal and lowland areas, and return to their breeding grounds in the uplands. They have blue-grey backs and a spotted chest and belly. Their narrow wings are often swept back in flight.

Finally, from now on you could spot hobbies as they return to Britain after their winter holidays. These breed across most of England, into Wales and just about into Scotland. They hunt over woodland edges and heathlands where there's plenty of large insect prey – they particularly like dragonflies. Fast-flying, with backswept wings, they're about the size of a woodpigeon, with grey and white plumage and a patch of red at the feet.

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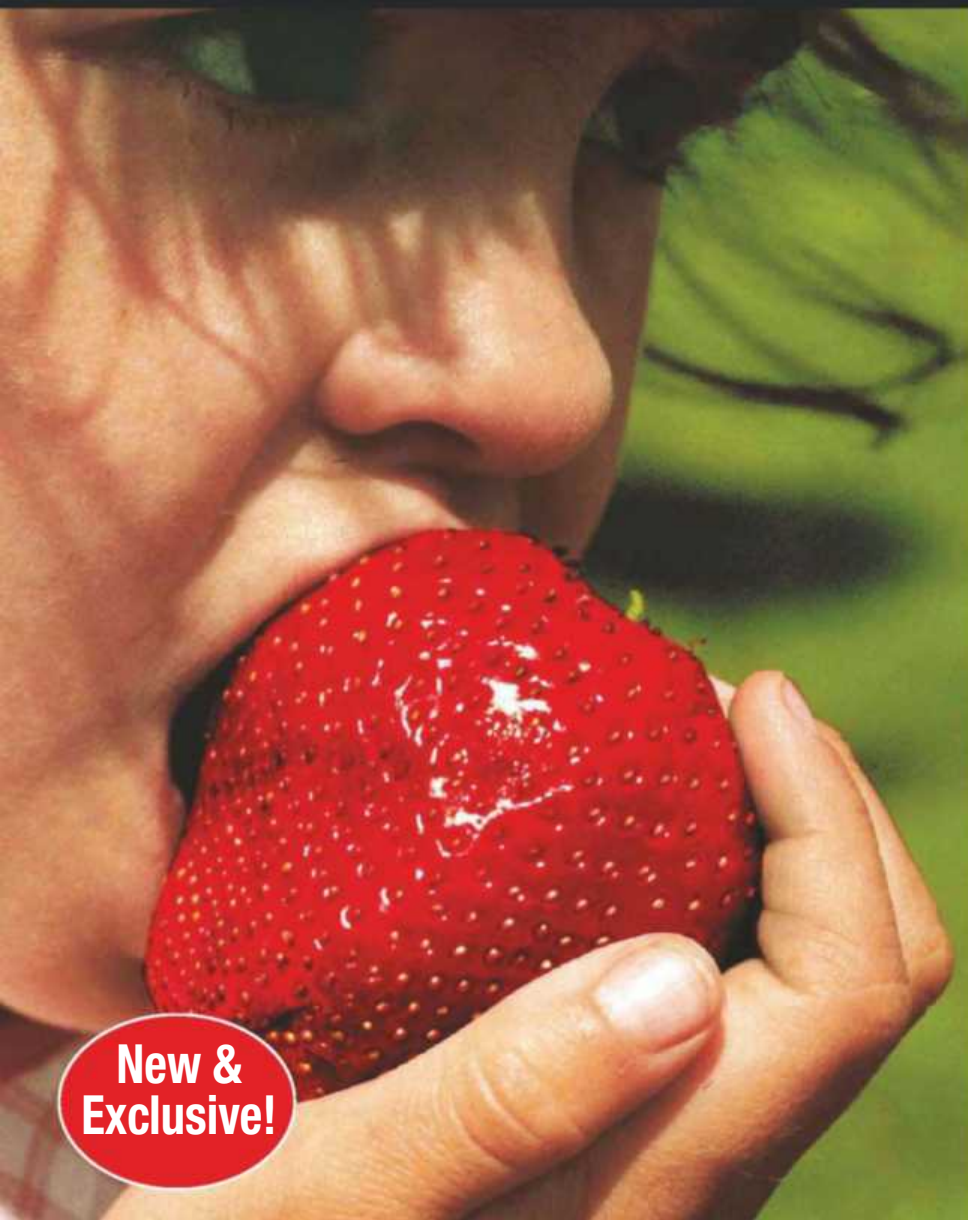
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Block planting of only one or two types of plants like this hydrangea 'Teller Blue' and Carex 'Evergold' is one way to make your garden look more modern

Part 4

How to make a Modern garden

Update your garden by adding blocks of perennials and grasses in geometric-shaped borders, says **Hazel Sillver**

CLEAN lines, pared-down planting and a no-frills colour scheme – modern garden style creates an air of unfussy simplicity that can be very calming and relaxing.

Reminiscent of the meditation gardens of Japan, its streamlined sophistication has a soulfulness to it – just like a tidy, uncluttered house, it somehow makes your mind feel uncluttered too.

If you feel that a border overhaul (or a whole garden overhaul) is in order, and you fancy having a go at the minimalist style, now is the time. Sow and plant over

the next few weeks, and come summer your revamped borders will be blooming.

Achieving simplicity

Cleanness and simplicity are the buzzwords of the contemporary garden, and there are lots of ways to achieve this. In a shady part of the garden, for instance, instead of having lots of different types of plants, you might put in nothing but hostas – selecting a few different leaf colours will provide more than enough interest; or you might choose a simple palette of ferns and white foxgloves.

Too many shrubs and conifers can

create a heavy look. One of the secrets to modernising your garden is to swap some of them for perennials and grasses.

If you have large shrubs and conifers at the back of the border to create weight and size, consider replacing them with a few bulky perennials and grasses. The height, colour, and form of giants, such as *Kniphofia* 'Nobilis', *Rudbeckia* 'Herbstsonne', fennel 'Giant Bronze' and *Miscanthus sinensis* 'Malepartus', will transform your flowerbeds.

Give the middle and front sections of borders a makeover by replacing some of the tired little shrubs, with compact perennials (such as *Sedum* 'Matrona' and *Nepeta racemosa* 'Walker's Low') and grasses (such as *Stipa tenuissima* and *Carex oshimensis* 'Evergold').

Plant in groups

Copy the top designers and plant clumps of the same grass or perennial. "Block planting in regular squares to match the linear lines of the house gives a contemporary modern look," advises



Water features should be simple and unfussy. Raised rills pouring into a trough, like this one, fit the bill



Traditional plants like roses can still be used but combine them with clipped evergreens and grasses for an updated look.

garden designer Claire Mee. "The block can be one type of plant. Plants that work well planted in blocks include *Miscanthus sinensis* 'Gracillimus', *Verbena bonariensis*, *Lysimachia ephemerum*, *Deschampsia cespitosa* and nepeta."

Create layers

"Focus on layering – varying grasses and perennial heights – to keep your garden looking interesting," suggests garden designer Charlotte Rowe. 'See-through' perennials (such as *Verbena bonariensis*)

are so lightweight that it's possible to see the plants behind

them. In this way, they create a fuller feeling in the border, and save on space.

Also useful are those perennials that flower on slim, vertical stems (such as verbascum), which means they can be planted in the middle of the border, to add focal points and depth.

Modernise with colour

Refresh your planting by focusing on two or three colours. This doesn't mean that the whole garden has to become nothing but red and orange; but, rather, that there's an emphasis on a few tones.

For instance you might select a palette of purple, pink and burgundy; and key plants could include *Verbena bonariensis*

"Plant clumps of the same grass or perennial"

Key tips

Transform your plot!

Charlotte Rowe, an award-winning garden designer in London, says...



1 Emphasise contrast

Use obelisks or evergreen shrubs in combination with softer perennials and grasses. A mix of soft perennials and textural grasses stands out well against a backdrop of evergreen hedges and box balls.



2 Simplify your colour scheme

Keep it simple, don't complicate the garden with lots of different colours. For example, stick to a soothing, pared-down palette of greens and whites, using white-flowered perennials and grasses.



3 Create layers

Achieve it by incorporating 'see-through' perennials, such as *Sanguisorba* and *Scabiosa*, which are so airy that you can glimpse the plants behind; and the layers they create give the border a sense of fullness.

◀ (a 'see-through' airy purple perennial), *Alcea rosea* 'Nigra' (a claret-black hollyhock), *Verbascum* 'Pink Domino' (rose-pink spikes), and *Echinacea purpurea* (purple-pink flowers), all of which reach 3-6ft (1-2m), and which look gorgeous planted together with grasses. Or you might prefer a palette of cool blues, which could be provided by *Echinops ritro* 'Veitch's Blue' (a wildlife-friendly globe thistle), and *Agastache* 'Blue Fortune', which both reach 3ft (1m). Plant them with grasses (such as *Calamagrostis brachytricha*) to achieve the modern look.

Many garden designers put heavy emphasis on green in contemporary planting schemes, often adding a few white flowers and silver foliage plants into the mix; and this has a wonderfully soothing effect.

Emphasise contrast

Although a mass of shrubs and conifers can make a garden look dated, do not think that all shrubs are suddenly old hat

“Clipped shrubs and evergreens add structure”

– far from it. Modern designers often employ the structure and solidity of shrubs to enhance the softness of perennials and grasses. For instance hornbeam or beech clipped into tall slim columns and dotted through a border looks wonderful; and evergreens (such as box and sarcococca) provide colour and shape all year.

Landscaping the modern garden

The sort of materials, features and furniture we have in the garden make a huge difference to its overall look. If you're trying to achieve a contemporary feel, go for decking, or perhaps the cool tones of slate; sticking with the simplicity of modern garden design, choose furniture in one of the colours you've selected for your planting scheme or for your hard landscaping in order to keep things understated – for example if you've chosen to lay your patio with slate, you might go for pale grey furniture.

Water injects any garden with soul, and reflects light, which in turn creates a sense of space. Put in a modern water feature, such as a rill, stainless steel sphere, or a zinc trough as a small pond.

Begin landscaping and planting now, and come summer your new modern garden will be a relaxing joy. ■



The modern garden has a geometric look, with clear straight lines and square or rectangular borders

2 Container choices



▲ *Festuca glauca* 'Elijah Blue'

Tall modern glazed pots set off the silver-blue needle-like leaves of these striking little grasses a treat. This is a display that will have impact all year. Needs full sun.

◀ *Miscanthus sinensis* 'Gold Bar'

Miscanthus are graceful grasses that arch gently, they're perfect for pots as long as you go for the smaller types. Choose from buff coloured varieties or zingy striped ones like this 'Gold Bar' variety. Needs full sun.

6 essential modern plants for beginners

Try it!



Stipa tenuissima

The silver-cream wispy plumes of this feather grass add volume and movement in borders in summer and autumn. Sun. H2ft (60cm).



Miscanthus 'Kleine Fontäne'

This fountainous grass produces red tassel-like flowerheads in late summer, which morph to faded silver ones in autumn. Sun. H4½ft (1.5m).



Calamagrostis brachytricha

The Korean feather reed grass has fluffy silvery grey purple-tinted flowerheads atop a fountain of grey-green foliage. H3ft (1m). Full sun.



Scabiosa atropurpurea

Butterflies love the claret pincushion blooms of this airy hardy annual (or short-lived perennial), which flowers into autumn. Sun. H2ft (60cm).



Echinops 'Veitch's Blue'

The indigo-blue spherical flowers of this striking globe thistle attract wildlife and remain as seedheads during autumn. Sun. H35in (90cm).



Echinacea 'Art's Pride'

Bees and butterflies love this hardy coneflower, which produces orangey pink flowers on short stems all summer long. Sun. H2ft (60cm).

How to make a Modern garden

What to do now

Be inspired

Look at books on modern planting style, such as the *New Small Garden: Contemporary Principles, Planting and Practice* by Noel Kingsbury, (Amazon £16.59).



Plant

Get shrubs, perennials and grasses into enriched soil in spring, and come midsummer, they should be established enough to produce a show of flowers.



Sow

Choose annuals that will look fabulous amidst your new contemporary planting scheme. For example *Ammi majus*, scabious and *Euphorbia oblongata*.



Update furniture

You could paint existing metal or wooden furniture a modern shade of light grey, soft green or pale blue. Consider installing a contemporary grey stone patio.



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A father-of-three who suffered such painful arthritis he feared he would need a double knee replacement says he has been cured by a pair of insoles.

Keith Young, 69, was bedridden when he was hit by crippling arthritis in both knees three years ago.

Mr Young, who was a keen scuba diver, golfer and fisherman, was in so much pain he considered ordering a Zimmer frame or undergoing knee replacement surgery.

However, in a final attempt to avoid these desperate measures he tried inserting copper insoles into his shoes. Within five weeks, the retired print firm boss noticed the pain was beginning to ease and now he is back on the golf course.

Mr Young, from County Kerry, Ireland, said: "I had arthritis in both knees. It was getting worse and worse. I'm overweight and 69-years-old and I was dreading the thought of needing two replacement knees. It got so bad I ended up walking with a walking stick and was considering a Zimmer frame."

"Copper Heelers have been a life saver!"

The father-of-three believed he was being plagued by old football injuries when he began to feel pain and discomfort in his knees. He visited the doctor who told him to see how things went for a while and 'come back if his condition worsened. Within weeks the arthritis began to impact on his ability to enjoy his normal active lifestyle.

Bedridden arthritis sufferer facing a double knee op is now "pain free" thanks to copper insoles

Keen sportsman is able to play golf again!

By EMMA INNES

The pain and the swelling were unbelievable. I took so many anti-inflammatories and paracetamol. I was at my wits' end. I used to stay in bed two days a week and then I ended up bedridden. I was extremely depressed and putting on more weight due to the fact I was unable to exercise. I am an active sort of bloke, always have been. I used to walk regularly, play golf and scuba dive."

However, Keith was forced to give up golf. He also found it impossible to enjoy his regular walks in the countryside with wife Elsa, 67. Defying his wife's wishes, Keith refused to go back to the doctor amid fears he would need a knee replacement.

Mrs Young was desperate to help her husband so she did a lot of research and came across a company selling copper insoles. She bought him a pair and he inserted them in his shoes. Within a week, he was more mobile, and was soon fit enough to join his wife on an occasional walk to the shops. Five weeks later he started to accompany Mrs Young on walks in the country with the help of a walking stick.

Full fitness

Now, he is nearly back to full fitness and is looking forward to getting his golf handicap down. He is now also able to walk briskly without pain. He said: "My pain has gone. I am no longer depressed and have cut right back on the pain killers. After



Keith Young, 69, says that within a week his mobility had increased and he is now 'pain free'

being bedridden for six weeks because of the pain I was very depressed. I felt like I didn't have much to live for but now I can honestly say the Copper Heelers have been a life saver."

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Ask Christine!

Christine Walkden's Masterclass on strawberries



Flavoursome strawberries 'Just Add Cream' (inset top right) crops from early May to the first frost, and 'Malling Opal' (right) crops from June to October, says Christine

Timefile, unless credited

Christine's expert strawberry tips



■ When growing strawberries under cloches for protection, open them up during the day when the plants are in flower so pollinating insects can visit.



■ Water soil or compost well (if growing in containers) in dry periods but avoid wetting the plants to help prevent grey mould attack.

How can I grow better strawberries?

Q My 'Cambridge Favourite' strawberries are reliable, but I'd like to grow more varieties for better flavour and heavier crops. Any suggestions?

Barry Fairclough, Llandudno

A Strawberries grow naturally at the edge of woodlands and prefer leaf mould or similar organic matter, light soil types (slightly acidic) and good drainage. As they are surface rooting, any cultivation (like hoeing) around plants should be shallow. Remove all perennial weeds and do not use land that has been used for growing strawberries for several years. Avoid frost pockets. A sunny sheltered site is ideal.

Prepare the site at least a month before planting, adding two buckets of well-rotted organic matter per square metre. A week before planting, apply 56g/sq m of Growmore and rake into the surface.

Always obtain certified plants which are free from pests and diseases. Using a trowel, make a hole for each plant and spread the roots out carefully, replace the soil and firm well.

Rows should be 30in (75cm) apart, leaving 18in (45cm) between plants. Water well after planting and ensure the crop is kept weed free during the growing season. Remove any flowers

produced in the first year.

Thereafter, apply Growmore (75 grams per sq/m) in April every year and as soon as they've finished fruiting apply hoof and horn fertiliser at the same rate.

As flowers set fruit, put down a mulch of straw around the crop to keep the berries clean and off the soil. Do not apply too early, otherwise the risk of damage by frost will be increased.

When the last of the summer-fruiting crop has been picked, cut off the leaves about 3in (8cm) above the crown, remove all unwanted runners, scrape off the old mulch and compost it.

Propagating strawberry runners

It is possible to obtain good runners in July and August. As new small plants appear, peg them down into the soil or into 3in (7.5cm) pots sunk into the soil using strong wire bent like hair pins. This will enable roots to form quickly.

Plant out newly-rooted plants in freshly-prepared beds.

If they have been rooted directly into pots they can be potted-on in August and used for forcing under glass for earlier fruit the next year.



Getty



Ask Christine!

With her team of experts John Negus, Anna Toeman, Dr Jane Bingham



Most varieties of roses are relatively straightforward to prune

How to prune an 'unknown' rose

Q We have inherited a rose. I don't know what variety it is, but it is around 8ft (2.4m) high. How should I prune it?

Val Ashton (via email)

A Start by pruning out any dead, diseased and dying wood, cutting to healthy wood just above a bud. Also cut out crossing branches where the thorns on one stem might damage another.

Stems can be removed either to their base, or to a strong sideshoot. Keep the centre of the plant open and uncluttered.

Over 3-4 years, renew the whole plant. If it has 8 stems, I would recommend pruning the oldest 2 down to the ground this year. Leave the remaining stems, just trim back flowered side shoots to remove dead flowers and hips.

After pruning, feed the rose with a general fertiliser or a specialist rose feed.



Worms eat material at the top of compost bins

Compost worms

Q Why do worms come up to the lid of my compost bin?

Sue Mann (via email)

A The usual reason for worms migrating to near the surface of a compost bin is that unrotted material at the top is a good source of food.

But if they are actually climbing out of the compost, it may be that the nature of the material in the bin is unsuitable. It may be too wet (dry it out), or too acidic (add a little lime, or charcoal).



Dwarf rhododendrons grow well in containers

'Mystery' shrub

Q What is the name of this dwarf shrub? It is quite small and is growing in a pot.

Janice Dieppe (via email)

A It is probable that your dwarf rhododendron is 'Ptarmigan'. It is ideal for growing in a large pot.

To keep it containerised, replace the top layer of compost, each May, with ericaceous compost, and feed fortnightly with an ericaceous liquid feed.

My bamboos have been battered!

Q We have three bamboo plants in pots, standing against a south-facing fence. Over the winter we had severe winds and the leaves turned brown. Will they be OK?

David Sheldon, Bramley, Hampshire

A Your bamboo has suffered from icy wind damage, but has not died. In mid-April, feed weekly with liquid tomato fertiliser when the compost is damp.

If the bamboo dies, and you wish to replace it with an evergreen screen, I suggest that you plant griselinia, photinia, *Cotoneaster lacteus* or eucryphia, a flowering plant with massed white summer flowers. All will grow to around 10ft (3m).

Set the shrubs in large half barrels. Make drainage holes in the base and cover them with crocks or pebbles. Stand containers on pot feet to ensure that surplus moisture escapes. Plant in John Innes potting compost No.3, and top with a mulch of pea shingle.



Bamboos will suffer in icy winds

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The drinks are on me: Sink yoghurt cartons in the soil, and fill them with cheap beer to create effective slug traps.



Timebnc

Many-headed tulips are charming



IFox

Why so many tulip heads?

Q A bunch of tulips bought at the local market included seven stems (out of 12) with multiple heads. What can cause this?

Jackie Fox, Ripon

A There are several varieties of multi-headed tulip, and they have special charm. Creating a riveting focal point,

they are as easy to grow as any other species or variety.

To get the best from them, liquid-feed them with a high-potash tomato fertiliser the moment leaves appear, and continue at weekly intervals until the foliage dies back for summer. It will boost bulb size and ensure a good display the following year.

What has attacked my shrubs?

Q Half of my shrub seems to be dying off, but others are doing very well. What's wrong?

Mrs Rosemary Stant (via email)

A The most likely cause is a reaction to cold or windy conditions.

It is always a bit odd when you see just part of a plant affected, particularly if nearby plants remain unaffected, but a small difference in the particular microclimate can be significant.

I suspect that the plant was subject to particularly cold wind or cold air at some point, perhaps exacerbated by a vulnerability to such conditions, and this is the reaction. As long as the plant remains alive it should re-grow from further down the stems.

It might be worthwhile cutting out the affected stems at some point, though not yet – wait and see how the plant fares once the warmer weather comes along.

Also check that the affected stems have not been damaged, as this might be preventing water reaching the leaves.



Plants should recover from the cold

RSstant

Quick Questions & Answers

Q Why is our plant losing its lovely leaves?

Ken Davies, Falmouth, Cornwall

A I suspect your *Codiaeum* (Croton) is dropping leaves because it is not warm enough – it must be over 60°F (16°C) – or the air is too dry.

Or you may have over-watered it. If so, repot in loam-based ericaceous compost, making sure that you cover the drainage hole with crocks to ensure that surplus water escapes.

Also mist the leaves with tepid water two or three times a week.



Q We have aconites growing in several beds. I want to plant bedding in early June, so if I mulched on top of the greenery now, would it be detrimental to the aconites?

Barbara Bright, Highland Perthshire

A Ideally, wait until the aconites have died back and green leaves have withered and discoloured before spreading well-rotted garden compost or manure over the bed.

If you apply it before the leaves have turned brown, they will not have finished energising the plants and next year's display may suffer.



Timebnc

Q Several of my young vegetable plants are literally vanishing overnight. I don't think it was slugs – what else could it be?


Audrey Collyer, Haverhill, Suffolk

A If you are certain slugs and snails aren't to blame, I would suggest rabbits, mice, birds or squirrels. I suspect you would see signs of rabbit activity, but you may not spot the others, even though they will take seedlings from the ground.

Next year, protect young plants with fleece or netting for the first 2-3 weeks, so they can put down strong roots and anchor themselves.



Timebnc



Our soil is neutral, so to be sure of enjoying the clear blue of 'Blue Bird' I am planting it into a container of ericaceous compost

How to grow...

hydrangea

For summer colour or papery, skeletal remains in winter, make sure to plant a hydrangea, says **Anne Swithinbank**

HYDRANGEAS are mysterious plants, as varieties with pink flowers can turn blue, blues can morph into pink. Some folk have even been seen burying rusty nails at the roots of their plants.

Pruning is puzzling too, as books say do it in spring, yet if you trim off too much, there will be no flowers that year. Despite this, the many varieties are easy to grow and bring much-needed colour to gardens late in summer. Even after the flowers have faded, their papery, skeletal remains are attractive.

Hydrangea macrophylla is a deciduous, woodland shrub to 7ft (2m) tall, native to Japan and also known as common or French hydrangea. Plants thrive in sunny positions as long as soil is moist but in drier areas, benefit from light shade.

Avoid damp hollows though, as they need good drainage. The best plants I've cared for grew in a north-facing border along the front of a house where the gutters leaked.

The flowers are interesting, because they are either tiny and fertile, or large and sterile with showy petal-like sepals.

In mopheaded sorts, the sepals create a dome-like flowerhead, whereas lacecaps produce dainty, flattish heads where larger sterile flowers appear to hover around a cluster of fertile ones.

Flower colour

Flower colour is determined by variety but is apt to change according to soil acidity or alkalinity. Whites often remain true but pink cultivars turn mauve as pH drops towards acidic. Adding garden lime

helps to increase alkalinity.

Blue hydrangeas rely on aluminium to retain colour and this is more available in acidic soils of pH5-5.5. Watering in iron sequestrine helps to unlock aluminium and partly explains the rusty nail theory.

However the nails are providing only insoluble iron oxide which is not available to the plants. Special colourants containing aluminium sulphate applied annually to established plants helps them stay blue, as will acidic mulches such as pine needles.

I like the slightly variable mauve tones produced by confused hydrangeas but if you prefer clear colours, one solution is to grow them in pots of appropriate potting compost. A neutral mix will preserve pink, while an ericaceous compost helps blooms stay blue.

TopTip

Common hydrangeas contain cyanide and as such are rarely eaten by rabbits and deer. This makes them an excellent choice for gardens where plants like roses are regularly nibbled.

Main: Shutterstock Circled: TimeInc

- ## Anne's top 4 favourite hydrangea varieties



clammy

A handsome and unusual-looking mophead, whose white petal-like sepals are decorated by a rim of red. Reaches 6ft (1.8m).



WI

Mouillere' Creamy-white mophead boasts an attractive greenish tinge as buds open and flowers fade. Autumn tints. Reaches 6ft (1.8m).



lamy

This strong blue mophead produces flowers over a long period, even from low down on the plant but turns mauve-pink if soil veers away from acidic. Reaches 5ft (1.5m).



lamy

A lacecap variety with rich rose-red florets when grown on alkaline soils. Even if blue creeps in, the florets retain a rich, jewel-like colour. Reaches 5ft (1.5m).

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TCM59095PA	Large Patio Pot & Saucer x 2 (39cm)	£14.98		£
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TCC47552	Incredibloom Fertiliser 1 x 750g Tub	£12.99		£

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Email

25 MARCH 2017 / AG774Z



Marianne Mahoney

Colour and scented plants are important in a sensory garden, as are touchy feely plants and textured surfaces

Still water is very calming, reflecting the surrounding plants and sky above

How to create a sensory garden

This type of garden offers positive benefits to all, but is particularly helpful to those with autism, disabilities or mental health problems, says **Kim Stoddart**

YOU'RE probably well aware how much your garden can provide an antidote to stress and sadness, or to the hectic pace of modern life; a calm space in which you can 'switch off' and relax.

For those on the autistic spectrum, like my 7-year-old son Arthur, a garden can become something of a lifeline.

Arthur can quickly feel overwhelmed and anxious. When he was little and having one of his meltdowns, I took him out into the garden where he almost instantly calmed down. Realising the importance of our outdoor space, I've since transformed it into a sensory garden with lots of sounds, smells, and tons of wildlife and areas for Arthur to explore.

A sensory garden stimulates the five senses of sight, sound, smell, taste and

touch without being overwhelming. Being close to nature has been proven to be therapeutic, and as long as your garden is relatively quiet, then sensory

sounds like rustling trees, bird song or the sound of water running, all help to create a tranquil space in which to relax and engage with your surroundings.

"I took Arthur into the garden where he instantly calmed down"

details can easily be weaved in and around your existing space with hardly any effort at all. Relaxing scents such as lavender, rose and jasmine or appealing



Kim's garden is a haven for her little boy Arthur, who has autism

Kim Stoddart/NP

3 essential sensory features



Attract wildlife in

A number of studies show that engaging with nature makes people healthier and happier. There are lots of ways to attract wildlife into your garden, from hanging bird feeders, to allowing certain areas of the garden to grow a bit wild, to building a wildlife pond to encourage frogs and toads.



Use sound

Incorporate lots of gravel paths to encourage movement from one area to another and to create a nice crunchy sound underfoot – you could even opt for coloured stones to add further stimulation. Likewise, the swishing sound that trees, bamboo and ornamental grasses make in light wind is calming.



Create a time-out area

If the size of your garden allows, create a special secluded area for people to retreat to. This is a particularly good way for those with autism to find quiet if they are feeling overwhelmed. Screen off the area with hedging, ornamental grasses or trellis, and include seating within.

Benches work well placed around the whole garden – but it's not just about sitting and reflecting – the process of gardening itself (planting and digging, for example) can be incredibly educational and confidence-building, especially for those with autism.

Getting Arthur to eat anything healthy is a battle, but foraging for edibles in the garden works wonders. Like a lot of children with autism, his diet can be limited at times – helping to sow and grow a wide range of fruit and vegetables engages him and encourages him to eat them after harvesting. So make room for a vegetable patch or raised bed or two, and weave in fruit bushes and trees where you can.

Plants that are poisonous should be avoided and any potentially dangerous power tools locked away. Otherwise it's about working with the individual and giving them the opportunity to express what they would like to do.

Activities like planting seeds and watching them grow, through to the watering of plants and foraging for fresh produce, have the potential to be grounding and life-affirming, whether you're on the autism spectrum or just simply desire a tranquil space to unwind. So it's worth considering some low maintenance adaptations in order to make your outside space a truly calming and stimulating place to enjoy. ■

What is a sensory garden?



Scratch-n-sniff: include plants with aromatic foliage such as herbs and pelargoniums



Ornamental grasses are good touchy-feely plants

■ All gardens are sensory but a specially-designed sensory garden will have a concentration of different experiences that stimulate the five basic senses of sight, sound, touch, smell and taste.

■ The sensation of having the senses tantalised can have a number of positive reactions – from being calming and therapeutic to providing enriching and educational experiences.

■ Sensory gardens are for everyone, but are particularly beneficial to children, and those who are disabled or suffering with mental health problems.

6 top sensory garden plants

Try it!



Lavender

If you add just one scented plant this spring make it lavender. Even better, why not a collection. Grow in large pots or borders especially around seating. Go for English lavender varieties, which have the strongest scent.



Roses

You can plant out pot-grown roses now or wait until June when the majority are in flower, choosing with your nose for the best results. If planting at this latter time, be vigilant with watering.



Mint

The scent is reputedly stimulating for the brain and the process of crushing a textured mint leaf to release the smell is sensory in itself. Just be sure to contain its vigour by growing it in a pot.



Jasmine

Plant out summer jasmine (*Jasminum officinale*) now and you'll be enjoying its delectable scent later in the year. Choose a sunny, sheltered spot that's south or west-facing. In a small garden plant it in a large pot and let it clamber up trellis.



Honeysuckle

Another climber that is incredibly easy to grow and which releases the most delightful fruity scent, especially at night. It's no wonder that pollinating insects love it.



Rosemary

This Mediterranean herb has a distinctive scent when the leaves are rubbed, which may also be stimulating for the brain and memory performance. It also attracts bees.

2 of the best sensory edibles

Being involved in the process of growing crops can help those with autism deal with some of their sensory barriers when it comes to eating fruit and vegetables.



Peas and fennel

Peas are easy to grow from seed and delicious eaten straight from the pod like sweets. Fennel is an appetite enhancer and good for autists that are under-stimulated by food, due to its strong flavour.



Soft fruit

Blackcurrants have a strong flavour, and they encourage foraging, which stimulates the senses. Raspberries and strawberries are also good.

Find out more

■ According to the National Autistic Society more than one in 100 in the UK are living with autism. Those with autism see, hear and feel the world differently to others in varying degrees, and the condition can affect how they interact with others. With the right sort of support, all can be helped to live a more fulfilling life of their own choosing. For more information see autism.org.uk

■ Kim is launching a new autism-focused care farm and social enterprise on her smallholding in West Wales. Go to greenrocketcourses.com

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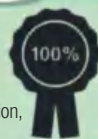
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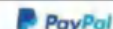
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Lavender 'Hidcote'

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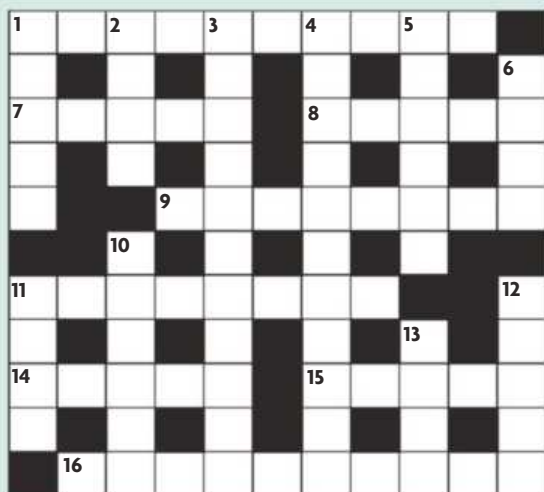
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- Buy 1 for £7.99
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Gardener's
Tea breakCrossword
...just for fun!

ACROSS

1 Technically it starts on 21 March – also a variety of kniphofia and *Papaver orientalis* (10)

7 Cake sugar, as in the perennial *Salvia greggii* '_____ Sugar' (5)

8 *Ficus elastica* is the Latin name for the _____ rubber tree (5)

9 Genus of the hardy perennial Stokes' aster – in the daisy family (8)

10 *Nerine sarniensis* is known as the _____ lily (8)

14 This cultivar of achillea and stachyurus is both an ancient Jordanian city, and the first Blue Peter dog! (5)

15 *Olea europaea* is better known as this – usually in oil and often with garlic (5)

17 Brussels sprouts in July and rhubarb in November... this is how you might describe them! (10)

DOWN

1 Genus of some 300 species of perennial grasses, known as feather grass, needle grass and

spear grass (5)

2 The butterfly orchid (*habenaria*) is also known as the _____ orchid – if it's on a leash! (4)

3 European singing bird, as well as a cultivar of both rhododendron and fuchsia (11)

4 This hosta cultivar is also said of a dancer or someone light on their feet (7,4)

5 This hosta cultivar is also a Gorgon monster of Greek mythology (6)

6 Lady pop singer, after whom a new genus of ferns has been named (4)

10 Typically (for we are now in the Christian 40-day fast), *Helleborus orientalis* is known as the _____ rose (6)

11 Spaces in flower beds and borders, perhaps, where some instant colour from bedding plants may be added (4)

12 *Lilium medeoloides* is known as the _____ lily (5)

13 Visible indication, as in the tall bearded iris '_____ of Leo' (4)

CROSSWORD ANSWERS
ACROSS 1 Springtime 7 clematis 9 Stokesia 11 Guernsey 14 Petra
DOWN 1 Stipa 2 Rein 3 Nightingale 4 Twinkle Toes 5 Medusa 6 Caga
10 Lenten 11 Caps 12 Wheel 13 Sign

KEYWORD TO WORDSEARCH 352 (AG, 18 FEBRUARY)
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See below for details of how to enter this week's competition.



How to enter:

Send your name and address on the back of a postcard to Unwins Sweet Peas Draw, Amateur Gardening, Westover House, West Quay Road, Poole, Dorset BH15 1JG. Or you can email your details to ag_giveaway@timeinc.com, heading the email Unwins Sweet Peas Draw. The closing date for entries is: 27 March 2017.

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Wordsearch

No:
357

This word search has words connected to indoor plants and houseplants. They are listed below; in the grid they may be read across, backwards, up, down or diagonally. Letters may be shared between words. Erroneous or duplicate words may appear in the grid, but there is only one correct solution. After the listed words are found there are 10 letters remaining; arrange these to make this week's KEY WORD.

S	F	G	N	I	T	S	I	M	C
D	F	E	R	N	S	E	O	L	A
A	C	B	E	S	Y	C	I	M	T
I	T	A	E	D	I	V	E	A	S
L	E	G	L	G	I	N	I	T	O
E	S	A	N	A	O	N	D	N	P
M	F	V	Y	A	D	N	G	A	M
O	F	E	L	A	Y	I	I	R	O
R	O	G	I	P	S	O	U	A	C
B	A	B	L	U	B	U	H	M	S

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BROMELIADS
BULB
CALADIUM
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IVY
LILY
MARANTA
MISTING
OFFSET

HOW TO ENTER: Enter this week's keyword on the entry form, and send it to AG Word Search No 357, Amateur Gardening, Westover House, West Quay Road, Poole, Dorset BH15 1JG, to arrive by Weds 5 April, 2017. The first correct entry chosen at random will win our £30 cash prize.

This week's Keyword is

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TJ67635	'Poppy Classic' Greenhouse frame and cover x 1		£14.99		

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Available in a range of colours from pastels to bold, rich shades, alstroemerias are star performers that keep shining all summer long

Marianne Majerus

It's time to plant...

Alstroemerias

Given the right conditions, Peruvian lilies will reward you with months of beautiful blooms, says **Annie Bullen**

THESE colourful perennials from South America, are equally at home in a traditional border or a more modern border. They'll brighten up your pots, too, especially if you choose lower-growing hybrids that will spread outwards rather than reaching for the sky.

But patience is required! Lovely Peruvian lilies need time and space to settle in, and you must allow them at least a couple of years to tuck their toes deeply in the ground and feel at home.

Plan ahead and choose a free-draining, rich and fertile soil in a sunny, sheltered spot, ideally in full sun. Some light shade won't harm them. Buy your chosen alstroemeria in the biggest pot you can afford, feeling gently to check that its tubers are fat and firm – or order tubers now, ready for dispatch in April.

Yes, you can buy alstroemeria tubers by post 'bare root'. This is certainly the cheapest option, but not one I would recommend. Although you might be lucky, the chances of achieving a healthy plant are low as the tubers and roots are very

fragile, easily damaged and can suffer a range of root rots.

Most modern Peruvian lilies are hardy down to $-5^{\circ}\text{C}/23^{\circ}\text{F}$ or lower. Once planted, leave well alone for a couple of years apart from giving a good thick (8in/20cm) winter mulch. After this time they will be securely rooted and will need no more fussing.

My first sight of alstroemeria was in a Suffolk garden many years ago. A huge and spreading patch of orange and gold seemed to be marching in all directions. Looking back, I think they must have been *A. aurea* (then called *A. aurantiaca*). Certainly showy, they were also vigorous. The only other types generally available then were the *A. ligtu* hybrids in shades from pale cream to rose-pink. These can be grown from seed, which is best sown in the autumn, to allow a natural winter chilling before germination.

These days, however, you are spoiled for choice. There are dozens of varieties, from tall and elegant 'Christine Marsh', a deep and dappled maroon, to the lower-growing 'Inca' series which are very suitable for showing off in pots. ■



Alamy

Florists' favourite

Alstroemerias – or Peruvian lilies – are not only beautiful in a vase, they are incredibly long-lasting, too. If you pick your stems fresh from the garden they will give you at least three weeks' decoration – probably more. All you need to do is change the water once a week or so.

6 amazing alstroemerias

Try our top picks for fabulous flowers



Alamy

'Indian Summer'

One of the few dark-leaved varieties available, with soft orange and red flowers at about 2ft/60cm.



Postalplants.co.uk

'Pandora'

A tall and beautiful light purple with a pale yellow throat. Especially good for growing as a cut flower. 3ft/90cm.



CA P

'Perfect Blue'

Another tall beauty at 3ft/90cm, with lavender blue flowers and a creamy throat. Good strong stems, too.



Alamy

'Friendship'

Delicate greenish-yellow flowers with a deeper yellow throat. Equally good in a mixed border and in a vase. 3ft/90cm.



Postalplants.co.uk

'Inca Glow'

This really good clumper has shocking pink blooms at around 18in/45cm. Flowers from June to November.



Garden World Images

'Maya Dwarf'

One of the 'Intichanca' series, this is low-growing at 8in/20cm. The white petals are enhanced by a pale pink throat.

Growing tips for foolproof results



Timelapse

Plug plants will need potting on

■ Prepare a well-drained site in sun or part light shade, adding lots of garden compost or well-rotted manure. Allow for plenty of growing space. A healthy plant will eventually spread to 24in/60cm. Taller plants may need supports.

■ Buy well-grown plants with firm tubers. Garden-ready plants in 1.5-litre pots will give a good show of flowers this season. Get them in the ground anytime from April to August. If you're buying plug plants, it's better to pot them up and wait for a bigger rootball to form before planting out.

■ Water them very well, but allow to dry thoroughly between waterings. Feed weekly with tomato fertiliser during flowering.

■ Protect young emerging shoots from slugs and snails.

■ Deadhead to maintain flowering for up to six months.



Timelapse

Garden-ready plants in 1.5-litre pots

Where to buy

For garden-ready pots:

Viv Marsh Postal Plants
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Thompson & Morgan
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5 planting ideas for alstroemerias



Grow in containers

Opt for shorter varieties that will not need staking, like the 'Inca' series. They look equally good grown as a specimen plant on their own, or in a mixed container with other sun lovers.



Go modern

Plant bold-hued varieties such as 'Princess Leyla' against a backdrop of grasses and spiky-leaved plants such as yucca and *Eryngium agavifolium* for a more contemporary look.



Contrast with blue

Pair fiery red and orange alstroemerias with the blue flowers of aconitum for an eye-catching late summer combo.



Enhance a cottage style border

Pastel shades like pink 'Diana Princess of Wales' work well with cottage garden favourites like penstemons, *Campanula persicifolia* and shrub roses.



Plant en masse

Group a single variety together and allow to spread for maximum impact. Choose a vigorous type like the rosy pink and orange-tongued 'Morning Star'.

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Your letters

with Jenny Bagshaw



Write to:

Jenny Bagshaw, Amateur Gardening, Westover House, West Quay Road, Poole, Dorset BH15 1JG or email: amateurgardening@timeinc.com

Home-grown exotics

I WAS interested to read 'How to create an Exotic garden (AG 4 March). I have found three plants that you can keep in the ground that will come up every year and can also be grown in pots.

They're *Ricinus communis*, *Canna phasion* and *Colocasia Coco* aka elephant ears. This latter plant has absolutely enormous leaves which give a fantastic effect. My exotic garden isn't as wonderful as the one created by Christopher Lloyd but I'm hoping it will be eventually!

Hannah Roberts, Dawlish, Devon

Jenny says... Sounds like you're on the right track Hannah to produce a stunning effect!



Colocasia Coco



Ricinus communis



Canna phasion



Star letter

Fond memories of my Nan

IT was great to go out into my garden in February to find that the buds on my camellia had started to open.

This particular plant has a great emotional significance for me as it reminds me of my late Nan who sadly passed last year, so I thought I'd share a picture with other AG readers.

Grant Rivers, South Ockendon, Essex



Readers Quick Tips

TWEEZERS and mini nail tools from an old manicure set are a safe and convenient way to handle or repot small, prickly cacti.

Linda Kettle, Portsmouth, Hants

A lily by any other name

I WAS ecstatic to see you mention 'Elodie' lilies in AG 4 March.

I brought some for friends a few years ago when they had a daughter who they named Elodie but nobody seemed to have heard of them then.

I've found their delicate flowers to be surprisingly robust and therefore longer lasting than my other lilies, though they're tall and benefit from carefully staking. If only they had a fragrance, but you can't have everything!

The only thing I would add to your advice is to carefully scrape away and replace the top layer of soil in the pot with fresh compost when removing the brown stems in autumn.

Iona Chisholm, Lichfield, Staffs





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**Jenny's
pic of the
week**

Terrific Tete-a-Tetes

FOR six years now I've had the gift of an early Spring greeting from these lovely little Tete-a-Tete daffodils.

When you long for early signs of Spring you're rewarded with a show of little green shoots. All it takes is a handful of bulb fertilizer to encourage growth and just look at the result you can have, year after year.

Maximum reward for minimum effort and expense.

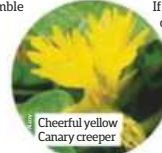
**John Livingstone,
Jersey, Channel Islands**

Sow simple colour with annual climbers



Sow annual climbers now but protect frost tender species

ANNUAL climbers are a cheap and cheerful way of bringing colour into the garden. They are useful for masking unsightly areas – compost heaps, sheds, wheelie bins etc – and scramble up and through trellises, pagodas, even unattractive shrubs and hedges. I want to grow some in pots to hide the garden shed, and sowing now will give early flowers. Hardy climbers like sweet peas, and near hardy *Trapaeolum speciosum* will be OK left outdoors in a sheltered spot, but tender types like cup-and-saucer vine *Cobea scandens* will need keeping frost-free in the greenhouse until May. Sowing now gets them established early.



Cheerful yellow Canary creeper

For best results, sow directly into pots or troughs of John Innes No 2, or multi-purpose compost with a top layer of seed compost to avoid seedling root burn.

If you are sowing hardy climbers or other hardy annuals directly into the ground, create a fine tilth, and water before sowing. Sow climbers in straight drills so you can support them. Canes and netting work, while hazel poles look very attractive. Popular climbers include

hardy sweet peas; and tender cup-and-saucer vine (green-white flowers ageing purple); Morning Glory (indigo, blue or purple trumpets); vivid yellow black-eyed Susan; and Canary creeper, which also have bright yellow flowers.

Combination catastrophe!

NO, no, no! Ruth Hayes tip on growing annual Canary creeper with Morning Glory (AG 25 Feb) was the worst plant combination that I ever tried!

One summer I thought it'd be a good idea to have a 'wall of colour' and help the insects in my kitchen garden.

The truth was the Canary creeper grew like mad and then it only flowered for three weeks. The wretched plant killed off the Morning Glory first and

then I realised that the wall of colour was setting seed like mad.

For the last four years I've been digging out those seeds from my garden. From early in the year to about September they keep popping up and get in the way of already growing veg!

In a small garden having a plant that's impossible to control makes life very hard to put new plants in the garden.

Maggie Powell, Minehead, Somerset

Glorious Morning Glory

WE grew Morning Glory last summer from the free seeds given away with *Amateur Gardening* and had a lovely show of blooms. They're also a great attraction for bees and wasps who enjoyed the pollen produced by the flowers.

Mrs June Platt, Norley, Cheshire

Jenny says... On the continent these scramble everywhere with gay abandon.



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Email: amateurgardening@timeinc.com

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Editor: Tim Rumball

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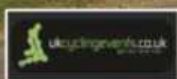
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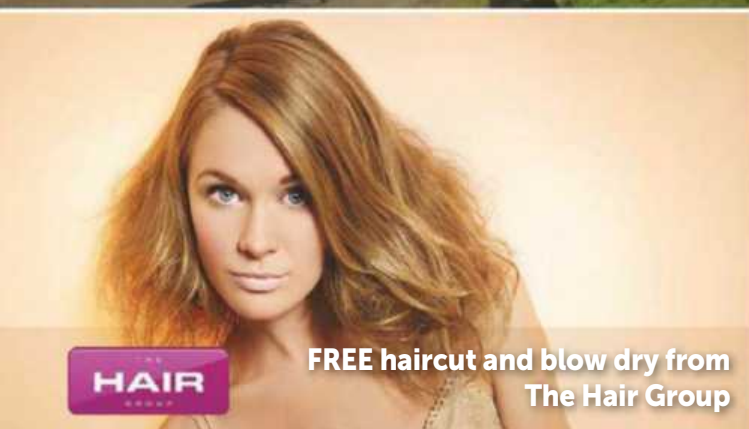


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Bird baths

Consumer editor **Julia Heaton** looks at ways of providing drinking water and bathing facilities for garden birds

OUR feathered friends love somewhere to drink and somewhere to bathe to keep their feathers in tip-top condition. Bird baths come in all shapes and sizes so when looking for one make sure birds have a good edge on which to perch for drinking, and that it is shallow enough in parts for them to stand up and splash around.

All will require cleaning and

washing – fairly frequently in summer – to keep the water sweet and algae-free. A soft brush will do the ones you can simply lift and tip out, for heavy stone ones you'll need a stiff scrubbing brush and a hosepipe or watering can to sluice them out afterwards.

We check out six completely different styles of bird bath to see what they offer in terms of usability, attractiveness and value.



Blue Glass Bird Bath

£24.99 RRP

01406 372227

gardman.co.uk for stockists

Score
13/15



Features

★★★★★

Wave-patterned **frost-resistant blue** and clear glass dish with four-legged, hinged black-painted steel stand with plastic cap feet. H. 18in (46cm), dia. 14½in (37cm), max. water depth 1in (2.5cm).

Performance

Hinged legs unfold and the glass dish is simply placed on top. Four plastic suckers keep the glass in place and stop it sliding about, ensuring the dish remains stable. The colourful glass feels robust and is broad but fairly shallow, and a flat base means it'll sit happily on any flat surface. The smooth glass wipes clean very easily.

Value

Shop around and you'll find it for much less than the RRP, making it great value for a cheerful, versatile design.

Fiesta Drinker

£7.99 + £3.25 delivery

0800 731 2820

birdfood.co.uk

Score
13/15



Features

★★★★★

Ceramic 'basket'-style bird bath/drinker, available in red, green or blue with 5in (13cm) plastic-covered wire hanging loop. Height 6¾in (17cm), dia. 4¾in (12cm), max. water depth 1in (2.5cm).

Performance

Easy to hang from a feeding station or a tree branch, it's small but still manages to hold a good mug-and-a-half of water and is pretty stable when hanging: even in blustery conditions it holds onto its water without spilling. Smooth finish is easy to clean, but solid sides means bathing birds might sometimes be obscured.

Value

Cheerful colours, excellent value, and will be at home in any garden – though its small size means you're unlikely to see more than one bird bathing at once.

Hanging Bird Bath

£12.43

0345 077 8888

homebase.co.uk for storefinder

Score
11/15



Features

★★★★★

Contemporary **square dished steel** bath with rounded wire sides, all finished in a dark bronze patina. Size 16in (41cm) square, max water depth 2¼in (5.5cm), suspended from four 21in (53cm) steel hanging chains on a steel ring.

Performance

Lightweight in itself, it holds a surprisingly large amount of water so you'll need something substantial to hang it from. It's filled weight means it tends not to swing about too much so it holds on to its water. Steel construction will rust eventually – the wired edges likely to be particularly vulnerable.

Value

A reasonable price for an unusual bird bath, but you may eventually need to coat it with non-toxic rust-beating paint.

Hatfield Cast Stone Bird Bath £59.99 + £4.99 delivery

☎ 0118 903 5210 🌐 primrose.co.uk

Features ★★★★★

A pedestal and square dish of cream-coloured cast stone. H. 20in (51cm), 16½in (42cm) square, max. water depth 1¾in (4.5cm).

Performance ★★★★★

Much more attractive than plain concrete, but even though it's in two pieces it's pretty heavy – you may need help to set it up in your garden. Its weight and solidity mean it won't be blown over, though. It'll weather beautifully, and birds will love the wide expanse of water to splash about in.

Value ★★★★★

A great price – you can easily pay more than twice as much for something of similar quality.



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Greenhouse Disinfectant £3.99

☎ 01530 510060

🌐 vitax.co.uk for stockists

Keep your greenhouse sparkling clean and free from germs, bacteria, moulds and mildew that might kill or stunt the growth of your plants. A concentrated disinfectant with added orange oils, it can be used on glass, work surfaces, pots and tools.



Greenhouse Gro-Beds x3

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🌐 marshalls-seeds.co.uk

Collapsible Gro-Beds are perfect if you don't want to create soil beds. You'll need four sturdy canes to slide into the sleeves of each side for rigidity, then the bed can be filled. They're 32in (80cm) long by 21in (54cm) wide and each takes 140-150 litres of compost.



Verdegris Bird Bath £21.99 RRP

☎ 01406 372227

🌐 gardman.co.uk for stockists



Features

★★★★★

Freestanding weather resistant resin plastic in verdigris-effect colour. Some self assembly required. Ground anchor pegs supplied. H. 24½in (62cm), dia. 15½in (39.5cm), max. water depth 3in (7.5cm).

Performance ★★★★★

Designed to look like expensive cast iron, it's pretty convincing with a large, deep dish providing lots of water. Four pieces screw together, but take care not to cross-thread them. Sturdy when assembled but light in weight, a strong gust may see it topple: the ground pegs will help. Smooth finish is easy to clean.

Value ★★★★★

A large, easy-maintenance and traditional-looking bird bath for not a huge amount of money.



Medium Copper Chalice £36 + £4.95 delivery

☎ 0800 699 0868

🌐 londongardentrading.com



Features

★★★★★

Hand-made copper dish with black iron support rod, first designed for a Chelsea show garden. Self assembly required. Height with spike 41½in (105.5cm), dia. 8¼in (21cm), max water depth 1¾in (4.5cm). Other sizes also available.

Performance ★★★★★

A garden sculpture in its own right – the solid steel support pole screws together before being screwed into a nut brazed onto the bottom of the copper chalice. Use a spanner to avoid risk of tearing the joint with the copper. The solid pole means it doesn't sway much so it holds its water well. Will eventually weather to a lovely natural verdigris finish.

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Get the look

Ideas for gorgeous gardens

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The attraction of opposites

Classic, clipped formality meets unrestrained cottage garden exuberance in Oxfordshire

MIXING formal and informal styles can be a gardening gamble. Get it right and the contrasting approaches enhance one another; get it wrong and you're left with something of a muddle, lacking both cohesion and identity.

Jane Stewart has skilfully make it work in her three-level Oxfordshire plot where a white formal garden, inspired by visits to Sissinghurst and Hidcote Manor, leads to a large sweep of lawn surrounded by wide borders filled with cottage garden plants that grow with abandon.

Jane says the L-shape of the house meant a formal design was an obvious choice for the top level. "It's enclosed on three sides, so it really lends itself to a formal courtyard area."

"The plot benefits from amazing soil"

With the help of her architect husband David, she was able to create the perfect symmetrical layout – the couple undertaking most of the planning, some of the hard landscaping and all of the planting themselves. Using her knowledge "plus a lot of trial and error" Jane filled the space with all-white plants, gradually adding touches of dark blue from the likes of *Campanula lactiflora*.

A small circular pond provides the focal point from which stone paths radiate,

while four box parterres enclose plants chosen for both colour and fragrance.

Along with the beautiful Cotswold stone walls and outbuildings this north-facing plot also benefits from "amazing" sandy loam soil. "It's very easy and workable," says Jane. "We're really lucky."

So aside from adding compost every other year and mulching with mushroom compost, little attention is required. The plants, too, make the most of their good fortune, and many in the lower-level borders require staking in summer. The planting here is far less restrained, with peonies, geraniums, geums and nepeta all fighting for their place.

"I've tried all sorts," she says. "But I usually come back to cottage garden plants because they just work so well."

The attraction of opposites

Keep extra seating tidy yet to hand by hanging folding chairs on nails on an exterior wall. The chairs have been painted green to complement the planting



Muted paintwork on the summerhouse – this one an Edwardian original – is echoed by the lounge cushions



In borders, play the numbers game by adding several of the same variety. "I plant in threes and fives for a sort of rhythm," says Jane, who has also installed a trio of obelisks



For a white rose choose 'Margaret Merrill' which benefits from disease resistance and exceptional fragrance



When deciding where to position seating, follow the path of the sun. This one captures the day's final rays



Hardy, silvery-grey *Stachys byzantina* makes a useful addition to a white garden and is the perfect foil for the deep blue of *Salvia x sylvestris* 'Mainacht'



Dusky-toned *Papaver orientale* 'Patty's Plum' is a strikingly unusual poppy, but staking and deadheading are essential



Maintain continuity with pots when planting by sticking to the same shades throughout

Create an island in an expanse of lawn – this one has a brick plinth and armillary surrounded by lavender



For a splash of yellow that will not need staking, try *Phlomis fruticosa*, which looks great teamed with blue nepeta



A cottage garden favourite, geranium 'Johnson's Blue' is great for ground cover in borders. Jane's tip is to cut them down in mid-summer for a second flush of flowers

Meet the owner

OWNER Jane Stewart

ADDRESS Steeple Aston, Oxfordshire

GARDEN SIZE Third of an acre

ASPECT North-facing

SOIL Sandy loam

VISITED June

SPECIAL FEATURES Mix of formal and informal, enclosed and semi-enclosed spaces within Cotswold stone walls. White courtyard with box parterres, large lawn surrounded by herbaceous borders, patio and Edwardian summerhouse, and a small orchard.



A winner's guide to online bingo



Online bingo is just as exciting as the traditional variety!

We tell you everything you need to know

Woman's Own BINGO

Every day, more and more women are playing online bingo – not just for the fun games but also for the great community. But if you're new to online bingo, it can be daunting knowing where to start. To help you get going, we've put together this guide to **Woman's Own Bingo**.

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Toby Buckland

Nurseryman and former Gardeners' World host



A snoozing cat looks harmless enough, says Toby, but their fouling can be a real problem on a freshly-tilled veg patch

Toby's top tips



■ It's illegal to leave traps or do anything that will harm a cat. Aim either to create a barrier (twigs) or use harmless water sprays or scents that keep them at bay.



■ Think long term. If you can keep cats out of veg beds for a season they tend to forget they ever marked there, and are less likely to come back.

Veg bed cat-astrophe!

Toby wages war on an a-paw-ling stink on the veg plot

IT turns out that I'm not the only one making use of my newly tilled vegetable beds. Our cat Parker has rudely decided to turn the freshly-raked soil into a giant litter tray, making it smell and meaning I must tread very carefully when sowing and hoeing.

To add insult to injury, the problem is getting worse as the neighbourhood cats are now flocking to this new latrine to try and out-do the other cats' doings.

So, in the spirit of fighting fire with fire, I've decided to leave a scent of my own – and don't worry, that's really nowhere

aromas we find slightly overpowering – things like lavender, citrus, peppermint and eucalyptus oil – are far too much for moggies to bear.

A teaspoon of the oil diluted in a ½ litre of water then sprayed onto soil is all it takes. Or you can do as I'm doing: soaking cotton wool balls in the oil then leaving them under up-turned terracotta pots where their aroma can waft but the wool is protected from rain.

My mother used the similar trick of scattering moth balls over the soil to keep cats at bay, but I don't like their fusty scent

and as they also contain pesticides I'm giving them a miss.

The oils, bought from a health food shop for around £3 each, have a strong but pleasant pong and I'll let you know which, if any, works best.

If they fail there's always the 'nuclear option': a motion-sensor water sprayer. Although expensive at £60 a pop they work a treat. The sprayer clips to the hosepipe, you set up the sensitivity, then any cats daring to walk into the line of sight, let alone kick up a stink, will get a harmless but startling spray.

"Fighting fire with fire, I'm leaving a scent of my own"

near as bad as it sounds!

The fragrance 'bomb' I'm dropping is made from plant oils that cats can't abide. As well as their unsavoury habits, felines also have noses that are 40 times more sensitive than our own. This means that

Job of the week

Set up a veg patch cat deterrent

PREVENTION is better than cure and if you can keep cats from the soil they can't foul your veg beds. Chicken wire fixed to timber battens and laid over the soil stops cats scraping and can be left in place for seedlings to grow through the gaps. In more ornamental areas use 'prickle strips', lengths of plastic mesh with soft plastic spikes on one side.



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